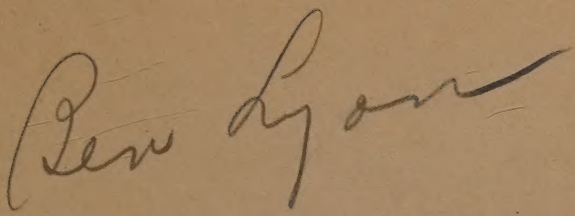
Wanted: A Husband

Samuel Hopkins Adams



WANTED: A HUSBAND

"I'VE DECIDED THAT YOU'RE NOT MY HUSBAND" (*page* 191)

WANTED: A HUSBAND

A NOVEL

BY

SAMUEL HOPKINS ADAMS

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WANTED : A HUSBAND

Chapter I

OUT OF ORDER! pertly announced the placard on the elevator. To Miss Darcy Cole, wavering on damp, ill-conditioned, and reluctant legs, this seemed the final malignancy of the mean-spirited fates. Four beetling flights to climb! Was it worth the effort? Was anything worth the effort of that heart-breaking ascent? For that matter, was anything worth anything, anyway? Into such depths of despond had the spirit of Miss Cole lapsed.

At the top of the frowning heights the studio apartment of Miss Gloria Greene would open to her. There would be tea, fresh-brewed and invigorating. There would be a broad and restful couch full of fluffy pillows, comforting to tired limbs. There would be Gloria Greene herself, big and beautiful and radiant, representing everything which poor little Darcy Cole was not but most wished to be, and, furthermore, a sure source of wise counsel, or, at worst, of

kindly solace for a case which might be too hopeless for counsel. As alternative, a return to the wind-swept, rain-chilled New York side street. No; the thing had to be done! Darcy nerved her soggy muscles to the ordeal.

On the second landing she paused to divide a few moments between hard breathing and hating the imitation-leather roll beneath her arm. Including the wall-paper design within, just rejected by B. Riegel & Sons, the whole affair might have weighed two pounds. To its ill-conditioned bearer it felt like two hundred. She set a hand to her panting chest and a thorn promptly impaled her thumb. Tearing off the offending rose Darcy flung it over the banister rail. It was a flabby, second-hand wraith of a rose, anyhow, having been passed down to the wearer by her flat-mate, Maud Raines, who in turn had it, along with eleven others, from her fiancé.

Darcy stuck out a vindictive tongue at the discarded flower. Nobody ever sent *her* roses! Dully musing upon the injustices of existence, she clambered up the third flight and leaned against the wall to rally her spent energies, with her hands thrust deep into the sagging pockets

of her coat. Something light and scratchy rubbed against her bare forefinger, which was protruding from a hole in her glove. Being exhumed, it revealed itself as one of those tiny paper frills wherein high-priced candy is chastely attired. The departed bonbon had come from a box sent by Paul Wood, the architect, to Darcy's other flat-mate, Helen Barrett, to whom he had just become engaged. Darcy let the inoffensive ornament flutter from her fingers to the floor and crushed it flat with a vengeful foot. Nobody ever sent *her* candy in frilly collars! Nobody ever sent her anything! Oozing wretchedness and self-pity, she took the final flight in a rush, burst in upon the labors of Miss Gloria Greene, planted herself in the middle of the floor, dropped her work roll and kicked it as far as she could, and lifted up the voice of lamentation in the accepted phrase, duly made and provided for such of feminine sex and tender years as find the weary pattern of the world too tangled for their solving.

"Oh, I wuh — wuh — wish I were duh — duh — dead!" mourned Miss Cole with violence.

Gloria Greene dropped the typed sheets

which she had been studying and rose from her chair. She looked down at the lumpy, lax figure of helpless, petulant rebellion before her.

"Oh, you do, do you?" she remarked pensively.

"Yes; I do!"

"So do most people at one time or another," was Miss Greene's philosophical commentary upon this.

"Not you," declared Darcy, glancing up at the vivid face above her resentfully. "I'll bet you've never known what it is to feel that way in your life."

"Oh, I'm too busy for such nonsense," returned Gloria in her serene and caressing voice.

Indeed, it would be difficult for any one favored with Miss Gloria Greene's acquaintance to imagine her wishing to depart a life to the enjoyment of which she has vastly added for thousands of people. For under a slightly different name Miss Greene is known to and admired by most of the theater-going populace of the United States. From the top of her ruddy, imperiously poised head to the tip of her perfectly shod toes, she justifies and fulfills

in every line and motion the happy thought which inspired the dean of American playwrights to nickname her "Gloria." Deeper than her beauty and abounding vitality there lies a more profound quality, the rare gift of giving graciously and naturally. It is Gloria Greene's unconscious and intuitive mission in life to lend color and light and cheer to colorless, dim, and forlorn folk wherever she encounters them. That is why Darcy Cole was, at the moment, dribbling tears and aspirations for an immediate demise all over Gloria's rare Anatolian rug. Not that Darcy really desired to die. She merely wished Gloria Greene to make life more practicable for her.

"That's imagination, you know," continued the actress.

"It is n't," snivelled Darcy.

"Then it's indigestion. Have a pill."

"I won't!" declined the girl rudely. "You're making fun of me. They all make fun of me. I do wish I was dead!"

"Do you, indeed!"

Setting two slim but powerful hands upon the girl's shoulders, Gloria Greene proceeded methodically to shake her. She shook her until

her hat (oh, but it was a bad and shabby hat!) came off and rolled upon the floor. She shook her until her hairpins fell like hail and her brown-black hair struggled out of its arrangement (oh, but it was a poor and tasteless arrangement!) and tumbled about her face (and, oh, but it was a sallow and torpid face!). She further shook her until her eyes bulged out and a faint flame shone on her cheeks, and her buttons began to pop, and her breath rattled on her teeth, and she could barely gasp out:

"St-t-t-top! You're shaking me to p-p-pieces!"

"Why not?" inquired Miss Greene blandly, and shook harder than before.

"D-d-d-dud-dud-*don't!*" wailed the victim. "W-w-wait a m-m-m-minute!"

The shaker desisted, still maintaining her grip. "What's the matter?" she inquired.

"You're killing me!"

"Then you don't want to die, after all?" inquired the other.

"Not that way!" gasped the girl.

"It's my regular treatment for dead-wishers."

"It's brutal," whimpered Darcy. "Every-

thing's brutal. The world's brutal. I hate it! I wish I — Glo-o-o-oria! Don't begin again!"

"*What* do you wish?" demanded the administrator of discipline implacably.

"I wish I'd never come here at all."

"That's different," commented Miss Greene, "though it probably is n't true, either. Now sit down. Tell me all about it. I've got a few minutes to spare."

"It's very long," began Darcy dolefully.

"You're trying to dodge. Begin at once. Or must I apply my treatment again?"

"Ow! No! Don't!" implored the girl. "I'll tell. But I don't know where to begin."

"Begin in the middle," suggested Gloria helpfully. "Then you can work both ways."

"I will. Well, then, you see, Maud's gone and got engaged."

"To whom?"

"Holcomb Lee, the illustrator."

"Why should that make you want to die? Are you in love with Mr. Lee?"

"I in love with Holcomb!" Darcy's bitter grin dismissed that supposition. "I'm not in love with *anybody*. It is n't that."

"Then what is it?" asked the patient Gloria.

"It's the whole thing. Helen Barrett is going to marry Paul Wood."

"If any woman know any just reason why these twain should not be joined together in holy matrimony, let her now speak or forever after hold her peace," solemnly misquoted Gloria.

"But — but — but Maud and Helen and I," pursued the girl, evincing symptoms of a melancholic relapse, "were going to be the Three Honest Working-Girls and keep up our Fifty-Sixth Street bachelor-girl hall for life. And now look at the darn thing!"

"What did you expect?" argued Gloria. "Maud is pretty and energetic, and Helen is one of those soft, fluffy creatures that some man always wants to take care of. Bachelor-girl agreements are only made to keep until the right man comes along, anyway."

"But where do I come in?" demanded Darcy, opening wide her discontented-looking eyes.

"Oh, you'll be getting engaged yourself one of these days."

For once in her tactful life Gloria Greene had made a stupid remark.

"Don't you patronize me!" flashed the girl. "I just won't stand it! I get enough of that at home from those two d——d fiancées."

Gloria turned a face of twinkling astonishment upon her visitor. "Why, Amanda Darcy Cole! What would the generations of your Puritan forbears —"

"Don't you call me Amanda, either! It's an old-maid name. I hate it—even if it does fit."

"It is rather a handicap," admitted her hostess. "But Darcy's pretty enough, anyway."

"It's the only pretty thing about me. Oh, Gloria," burst out the girl in a sudden flood-tide of self-revelation, "if you knew how I long to be pretty! Not beautiful, like you; I would n't ask as much as that. But just pretty enough to be noticed once in a while."

"Why, Darcy, dear —"

"No: let me talk!" Darcy proceeded in little, jerky gasps of eagerness. "Pretty. And well-dressed. And up-to-date. And smart. And everything! I'd sell my soul to the devil if he'd buy such a weakly, puny, piffling little soul, just really to live and be something besides a 'thoroughly nice girl' for one short year. 'A thoroughly nice girl'! Yah!" said Miss Cole

in a manner which, whatever else it might have been, was not thoroughly nice.

"That's a rotten thing to say about any one," agreed the sympathetic Gloria. "Who calls you that?"

"The girls. You know the way they say it! Well, no wonder. Look at me!" she cried in passionate conclusion to her passionate outburst.

Gloria looked at her. She beheld an ungirlish frump of a thing with a lank but bulgy figure misclothed in woefully inappropriate garments, a muddy complexion, a sagging mouth, a drooping chin, a mass of deranged hair, and big, deep-gray, lusterless eyes, which implored her. The older woman considered and marveled.

"My dear child," she said gently, "are you sure it is n't some man?"

"I don't care a darn for any man in the world," returned the other with convincing promptitude. "It is n't that. It's just that I'm not — I don't —" Her courage seemed to ebb out, but she gained command of herself and continued plaintively: "All I want is to be in the game as other girls play it — to have a little attention and maybe a box of candy or some

flowers once in a while: not to have men look past me like a tree. It is n't much to ask, is it? If you knew how tired I am of being just plain nobody! There's a — a somebody inside here" — she thumped her narrow, ribby chest —"but I can't get it out." Rising lumpily to her feet, she stretched out hands of piteous and grotesque appeal. "Please, Gloria," she prayed in a dwindling and saintly voice, "I want to raise just a little teeny bit of hell before I die."

A flash of sympathy and comprehension from the actress's intent face answered this noble aspiration. "Why, you're real, are n't you!" she exclaimed.

"Did you think I was n't even *that?*" returned the other reproachfully.

"Not so many people are. It's something, anyway. Are you going to be honest, as well?"

"How, honest?"

"With me. Are you going to be frank?"

"Of course."

"Then tell me what started you on this."

A dismal sort of muddy flush overspread the girl's features. Silently she drew from her pocket a full-page drawing from "Life" which

she unfolded and handed to the other. She laid a finger on the central figure.

"That's Darcy," said she.

"Is it?" Gloria studied the illustration interestedly. "Who drew it?"

"Holcomb Lee."

"That scrawl in the corner means Lee, does it? Is it drawn from life?"

"Yes."

"What does Maud say to your sitting as model for her young man?"

"Maud laughed," said Darcy between her teeth.

"Pussy, pussy!" commented Miss Greene. "That decided you to keep on, I suppose."

"Naturally."

"Well, the result justifies you."

"D' you think it's pretty?"

"I most certainly do."

"And don't you think it looks just the least lee-eetle bit like me?" pursued Darcy shyly.

Gloria scrutinized the drawing again, and then the wistful face before her. With growing astonishment she realized the fundamental likeness.

"IF YOU KNEW HOW I LONG TO BE PRETTY!"

"More than that," said she. "That young man knows how to see with his eyes."

"It was his own notion," said the girl in a rush of words. "One night I was sitting at the piano. He said there were lines in my face that he wanted. He asked me if I'd sit for him once. Then he had me come back again and again. I did n't mind. I — I liked it. It was the first time any one had ever seen anything to admire about me since I was a child. Oh, and one day he said: 'Miss Darcy, you must have been a beautiful child.'"

"Were you?" asked Gloria.

From another pocket Darcy took a small photograph holder. "Exhibit B," she said, passing it to the other.

It showed the head and shoulders of an eleven-year-old girl.

"It's charming," said Gloria, and meant it.

"That's the way I ought to look now, only more so, Holcomb said. He said I was a spoilt job."

"Pig!"

"Oh, no. He did n't mean it that way. He just blurted it out as if he was sorry about it. He seemed to think that I was a waste of good

material and — and he was quite peeved about it and kept swearing under his breath while he was drawing me."

"There I'm with him," declared Gloria vigorously. "I hate waste. It's in my Yankee blood, I suppose. And a wasted human being — that's a sort of practical blasphemy, according to my religion."

Darcy caught the inference. "Made in the image," she said quickly. "But what am *I* made in the image of!"

"What happened to change you from this?" Gloria held up Exhibit B.

"Well, I had an illness when I was thirteen. And about then we lost our money. And my parents died a little while after. And I never seemed to get back much life or spirit or ambition or digestion or anything."

"Can't get hold of your own boot-straps?" queried the other suggestingly.

"Have n't got the lifting power if I did," answered the girl. She picked nervously at her raveled and seedy sleeve. "Lee said he believed I could look like that — the way he made me look in the picture, you know — if only some one who knew could tell me how to go about it.

D' you think maybe — p'raps — it might be just partly possible?"

Once more Gloria compared Exhibit A with Exhibit B, and then both with the original.

"I do," she pronounced with fitting solemnity.

"Oh-h-h-h!" breathed Darcy in a long-drawn, ecstatic sigh.

"At least partly possible. It's worth the trial, in any case. Darcy," said Miss Greene incisively, "I'm going to take you in hand, myself."

"Oh, Gloria! If you would! I'll love you forever for it."

"You won't. On the contrary, you'll probably hate me poisonously before it's half over."

"For helping me to be something and look like something?" protested the girl incredulously. "How could I be anything but the most grateful —"

"Wait and see," interrupted the oracle. "We're going to begin our little magic process right now. Presto — pass! You're a lay figure."

"A what?" faltered Darcy.

"A lay figure. Act accordingly."

"What does a lay figure do, please?"

"It does n't. It's dead. It's dumb. Don't talk. You distract my mind."

For several minutes she walked around the girl, debating her from every angle with pitiless impersonality, and with the analytical eye of the adept in a school wherein attractiveness is often a personal and technical achievement. At the conclusion of this ordeal Darcy found herself perched upon a high-backed seat while the actress expertly daubed her face with make-up from a box kept for purposes of experimentation. Next the subject's hair was arranged, and her figure draped in the flowing lines of some shimmering fabric, chosen, after much profound consideration on Gloria's part, from a carved chest. She was then told to straighten her spine, and smile. Near her lay Gloria's hand mirror. Before the proprietor could interfere the girl picked it up and sat staring into it.

"Well, and what do you think of yourself?" queried her mentor grimly.

"I — I look like a bad joke," whimpered Darcy.

"You do. But if you cry I'll set you out on the fire-escape just as you are, for the neighbors to throw things at."

"I'm n-n-n-not c-c-crying."

"And don't grab, next time. Well-conditioned lay figures never do. Sit *up!* You're all caved in again."

With strong hands she prodded, bent, and moulded the girl's yielding figure to the desired posture. Finally she wheeled into position, several yards away, a full-length glass, and turned on an overhead light.

"Now. Look in here."

Looking, Darcy gave a little gasp of wonder and delight. Under the modulated radiance and with the toning down of distance, the harsh, turgid spots and lines of the make-up had blended into a harmonious *ensemble*. The face was that of Holcomb Lee's picture — almost.

"Oh!" cried Darcy hoarsely. "Could you ever make me like *that?*"

"No."

Darcy collapsed. "I might have known," she wailed.

"What do you expect for a nickel, in these days of depreciated currency?" inquired Gloria callously. "It is n't as simple as it looks."

"But if you can't do it for me —"

"I certainly can't, my dear."

"Then why did you let me—"

"But if I can't, perhaps some one else can."

"Who?"

"You."

"Me!"

"You, your own little, lone self, and no one else in the whole big, round world," declared the actress with electrifying vigor. "Thou art the woman."

"What must I do? How do I do it? What do I need?" cried Darcy in a breath.

"Grit."

"Is that all?"

"All? No; it is n't all. It's just a beginning. But if you think it's an easy one you don't know what the word means yet."

"Pooh!" retorted Darcy with another glance at the magic glass. "I'd cheerfully stand still and be stuck full of red-hot pins and needles, if it would make me look like that. I'll furnish the grit," she added confidently, "if you'll show me how to do the rest."

There came a gleam into her mentor's eye that the girl missed. "Very well," said Gloria. "Allowing that, let's make a start. Of all your

little ambitions which one would you like to have fulfilled first?"

The girl pondered. "Dress," she decided presently. "I want to have beautiful, thrilling clothes, like a princess."

"The one princess of my acquaintance," observed Gloria, "looks as though she dressed herself backwards out of a mail-order catalogue. But that's beside the question. Clothes cost money. How much money have you got?"

Darcy clasped her hands. "I'm rich," she announced triumphantly.

"How rich?"

"Awfully rich. Two thousand big, round, hard, beautiful dollars. Is n't that grand!"

"I don't know that it's grand. But it's good — with care."

"It's twice as much as I've ever made in a whole year of work on my silly little wall-paper designs." Darcy directed a resentful look at the imitation-leather roll, lying in the corner where she had kicked it.

"Where did you get it?"

"My blessed old Aunt Sarah wrote it to me."

"*Wrote* it? Wrote you two thousand dollars?"

"Yes. Why not? She'd intended to leave it to

me when she died. But she does n't feel like dying for a long time yet; so she wrote and said that she preferred giving it and getting thanked because it was so much, rather than willing it and getting roasted because it was so little."

"Sensible auntie! Are you going to be sensible too?"

"How?"

"Put the money in the bank. And forget this experiment."

Darcy stretched out desperate hands toward the big, blessed mirror.

"And give up *that* Me?"

"Perhaps you never could be that. It's only a chance at best."

"But it *is* a chance. You said it was a chance yourself."

"Yes; but—"

"And now are you going to take that away from me?"

Gloria's eyes were doubtful. "Is it worth two thousand big, round, hard, beautiful dollars? Just the bare chance of it?"

"Two million," declared Darcy with impassioned conviction.

"Then you're determined to be a fool about this?"

"I am."

Suddenly Gloria seized and hugged her. "If you were n't, I'd disown you as a recreant to our sex," she cried.

"Then you're going to help me?"

"To the bitter end! First let's take an inventory. Be a lay figure again."

The girl stiffened to attention. Gloria ticked off the points on her fingers as she talked.

"You've got several assets. First, you're a lady. Nothing to teach there, and it's the hardest of all lessons. Second, you've got a really charming voice if you did n't whine with it. Third, your hair is nice. But it might as well be stuffing a pillow for all the good you get of it. Fourth, you've got eyes that'd be dangerous if the whites were n't yellow. If you'd try wearing your heart in 'em instead of your liver, they'd do very well. Fifth, the lines of the face — see 'Life.' Sixth, you look as if you were built to be light and strong."

"I rather like being a dummy," purred Darcy.

"Wait. The other side of the ledger is com-

ing. You're going to have a bad five minutes. Stand up."

Darcy obeyed.

"Like a camel," dispassionately commented the actress. "Look in the glass now," she ordered.

Darcy looked.

"How d' you like it?" demanded her instructor.

"N— not as well."

"I should think likely. You lop."

"I — I can't help it."

"Nonsense! You slump."

Darcy's lips slackened petulantly down at the corners. Like a flash, Gloria transfixed the offending mouth with two leveled fingers.

"You peeve," she accused.

Darcy continued to peeve. Also she sniffled.

"Your chin is flabby," pursued the inexorable critic. "Your mouth is fishy. Your eyes are bleary. Your skin is muddy. You walk like a duck, and you stand like a bag. And if you cry I'll quit you here, now, and forever."

With a mighty struggle, Darcy choked back her emotions. "I suppose the Lord gave me my face," she defended herself sulkily.

"Don't libel your Maker. The Lord gave you *a* face. See Exhibit B."

"I can't help it if —"

"Of course you could have helped it! What you've done to your face is a crime, Darcy Cole! You ought to be arrested! Not to mention what you've done to your figure. I should n't be surprised," she added as the doorbell rang, "if that were the police now, come to hale you away to judgment. Sit still," she commanded as Darcy, suddenly conscious of her exotic costume, looked about for a way of escape.

The door opened, not to the police, but to a visitor who was presented to the shrinking Miss Cole as Mr. Thomas Harmon. Mr. Harmon displayed himself as a stocky man with very cheerful, bright brown eyes, reassuringly deferential manners, and a curious effect of carrying his sturdy frame as if it weighed nothing at all. Darcy mentally observed that he looked as fit in his way as did Gloria in hers. Already she was beginning to take note of physical condition.

"Have I interrupted a rehearsal?" asked Mr. Harmon.

"No," said Gloria. "That is, yes."

"That's a fair choice," remarked Mr. Har-

mon magnanimously. "I'll take yes. Am I right, Miss Cole?"

"It does n't matter. We'd finished," murmured Darcy confusedly.

"I've promised Mr. Harmon," Gloria explained, turning to her, "to help him choose an anniversary present for his sister. It won't take more than an hour. Amuse yourself until I come back."

On the stairway outside, Gloria, intent upon her new purpose, addressed her companion.

"Tom, what do you think of her?"

"Of whom?"

"Little Darcy Cole."

"Oh" — vaguely — "I don't know."

Gloria sighed.

"Why the effect of hopelessness?" inquired Tom Harmon.

"Oh, nothing. Only, you don't seem to use your eyes much."

"I was using them to the best of purposes," declared Mr. Harmon indignantly. "Considering that I have n't set them on you for nearly a month, you can't expect me to waste time on casual flappers in fancy-dress costumes. Be fair, Gloria."

"Darcy is n't a casual flapper."

"What is she, then? A coming genius?"

"A reigning beauty and heart-wrecker of the future."

"Good *Lord!*" said Mr. Harmon with such fervor that Gloria sighed again.

"Could n't you see anything in her, Tom?" she asked appealingly.

"Only the humpy way she wore that costume and the fact that she'd apparently been crying," answered Mr. Harmon, who, despite Gloria's strictures, was a person not devoid of discernment. "She seemed rather a mess to me. What's the idea, Gloria? Anything I can help in?"

Gloria smiled. "It's like you to want to help. But this is my job. And," she added to herself, "it's going to be a real one."

Chapter II

LIGHT and vitality died out of the atmosphere for Darcy, with Gloria's exit. Divesting herself of the trappings of glory and hope and promise, she resumed her workaday garb. The long mirror, endued with a sardonic personality, watched her with silent but pregnant commentary. She did not wish to look into it. But her will was weak. Hypnotic effluences, pouring from the shining surface, enveloped and drew her. She walked before it and surveyed herself. The effect was worse, by contrast, than she could have imagined.

"Oh, you frump!" she whispered savagely. "You frazzled botch of a frump!"

Glowing ambition faded to dull and hopeléss mockery in her disillusioned soul. She made a bitter grimace at the changeling in the glass.

"Imbecile!" said she.

It was a surrender to grim facts. Suddenly she felt extremely languid. The big couch in the peaceful, curtained alcove lured her. She plumped into it higgledy-piggledy and curled up, an unsightly, humpful excrescence upon its

suave surface. Within two minutes, worn out by stress of unaccustomed emotions, she was winging her airy way through that realm of sleep wherein happiness is the sure prize of being, and beauty is forever in the eye of the self-beholder.

Dream music crept into her dreams. Clearer and richer it grew until it filled the dreams so full that they burst wide open. The dreamer floated out through the cleft to a realization of the fact that somebody beyond the draperies which secreted her was piping like Pan's very self, to an accompaniment of strange, lulling, minor chords. She peeped out.

A tall, slender young man in clothes which seemed to Darcy's still sleep-enchanted eyes to fit him with a perfection beyond artistry, sat at the piano, humming in a melodious undertone a song of which he had apparently forgotten the words. One passage seemed to puzzle him. He repeated the melody several times, essaying various harmonies to go with it, shook his head discontentedly, and dashed away into Gilbert and Sullivan.

In the midst of this the door opened. Gloria stood on the threshold. A look of pleasure

flashed over her face as she saw the player. A dozen light, soft-footed steps carried her to him. She clasped her hands over his eyes, let them slip to his shoulders, planted a swift, little kiss on the top of his head, and stepped back.

"Jack!" she cried.

The man swung around, leaped to his feet, caught her by both hands, and exclaimed:

"Well, *Gloria!* It's a treat to see you."

"I'd begun to think you were never coming back. Where do you hail from?"

"Oh, all over the map. But no place as good as this."

He smiled down at her, still holding her hands. To a keen, thin, sensitive face, with a mobile mouth and quiet eyes, the smile set the final impression of charm. Instanter and before he had spoken ten words, Darcy decided that he was the one man she had ever seen worthy of Gloria Greene. And she was glad they had found each other.

"But where's Darcy?" asked the hostess, looking about.

"Who?" asked her visitor.

"A little acquaintance whom I left here when I went out."

The concealed girl sat up. "Here I am," she announced shyly. "I fell asleep."

"Oh, then I'm afraid I waked you up with my silly hammering," said the man.

"N-no. It does n't matter. I did n't mind. I — I mean, I liked it," stammered the girl, falling into her usual acutely zero feeling in the presence of the masculine gender.

"Then go and play it again, Jack," commanded Miss Greene, "while I get off my things. And then go away. You can come back for dinner. Miss Cole and I have important things to talk over."

"Oh, no! Please! I can come some other time," protested Darcy in a flutter of embarrassment. "I don't want to drive Mr. — Mr. — him away."

"Mr. Jacob Remsen has all the time in the world," said Gloria calmly. "Time is the least of his troubles. He kills it at sight."

"Don't mind her, Miss Corey," put in Remsen.

Darcy, noting the error in her name, wondered petulantly why Gloria did n't introduce them in proper form. But her uneasiness and *gaucherie* presently dissipated before the cordial

and winning simplicity of Gloria's man. And, to her own surprise, she found herself volunteering a harmonic solution of the difficult change where he had blundered over the transition, and humming the melody while she played her version. He accepted it with enthusiasm.

"Sing it," he urged. "I like your voice — what little you let us hear of it."

Instantly Darcy stiffened up inside and stammered a refusal. She did n't mean to be ungracious to this sunny and inspiriting young fellow. It was just her unhappy consciousness of a cramped and graceless self. Remsen took it with matter-of-fact good humor.

"I'm sure you do sing, though," he called back as his hostess finally evicted him. "I'm going to send you that song."

But he did n't look at her, she noticed, as he said it. Why should he, indeed, when Gloria was in the room? For that matter, men never looked at Darcy. And here was her grievance against the scheme of things exemplified anew.

"There it is," she complained, waving an awkward arm toward the door through which Mr. Jacob Remsen had vanished. "That's what I've been trying to tell you about."

"Jack?" puzzled her hostess. "Why, what's wrong with Jack?"

"Oh, nothing," replied the girl wearily. "But — did you notice what he did when he left?"

"Offered to send you some music. I thought it was quite polite. Jack's always courteous."

"Oh, *courteous!* He did n't even *look* at me."

"Well, why —"

"That's it! Why? Why should any man look at me? They don't. They — they're strictly neutral in their attitude. And women are — well — just tolerant and friendly. 'Darcy's such a *nice* girl.' Where does that get you?" fiercely demanded the subject of it. "People don't really know I'm *alive*. I might as well be a ghost. I wish I were. At least I'd scare 'em."

"Don't try to scare me," returned the other. "Now list to the voice of wisdom. You complain that people don't know you're alive. Why should they? You don't give out anything — warmth, color, personality. I'm not so sure you *are* alive. You're inert."

"I have n't anything to give," mourned the accused.

"Why? Because you've wasted it. You've

had beauty; good looks, anyway. You have let that die down to nothing. One thing only you've kept up, and that ought to be an asset. You've got a voice. Do you ever use it for other people?"

"I don't like to sing before people."

"There you are! Always thinking of your little self. You give nothing to the world, yet you think yourself ill-used because —"

"What does the world give me?" broke in the aggrieved Darcy.

"Nothing for nothing. What would you expect? Do you think it's going to smile at you when you scowl at it, and stop its own business and gaze on you adoringly and say, 'Much obliged to you for being alive'? It is n't that kind of a world, Miss Amanda Darcy Cole."

The owner of the despised first name winced. "I never thought of that," she murmured.

"Thinking is going to be part of your education from now on. You can't begin too soon."

"I'm ready," said the girl meekly. "Do you want me to begin with my voice? Shall I take singing lessons?"

"Oh, it's got to go a lot deeper than that," was Gloria's grim reply. "You'll begin by

taking *living* lessons. Do you know what that means?"

"I'm not sure I do. It sounds awfully hard," faltered the other.

"It is. Go home and think it over. Come back here to-morrow at this time and get your orders."

"Yessum," said Darcy, folding her hands with assumed docility.

Gloria regarded her with suspicion. "It is n't going to be any joke," said she with severity.

"No'm," assented Darcy with a still more lamblike expression. But her eyes twinkled through it.

"Oh, well, if you want to take it that way," observed the actress. "But *I'd* advise you to save your high spirits for the time when they'll be needed."

In the seclusion of the hallway Darcy drew out Exhibit A and sought inspiration from the charming face which Holcomb Lee had surrounded with gallant and admiring suitors in the illustration.

"If it can be done," said Darcy to the picture with the solemnity of a rite, "I'll do it."

Chapter III

AT its best, the old Remsen house on West Twelfth Street, wore its ancestral respectability cloaked with gloom. Home though it was to Jacob of that name and possession, he regarded it with distinct distaste as he approached the dull, brown steps leading to the massive door. All that could reasonably be done to furbish it up against the young master's return, old Connor, Jacob's inherited man, had faithfully attempted: the house's face was at least washed, and its linen, so to speak, fresh and clean. But a home long unused becomes musty to a sense deeper than the physical. Entering, young Mr. Remsen felt a chill descend upon his blithe spirit. A *basso profondo* clock within struck a hollow five.

"Hark from the tomb!" observed young Mr. Remsen. "I think I'll move to the club."

Slow footsteps, sounding from below, dissipated that intention.

"No; I can't do that. I've got to stay here and be looked after by old Connor, or forever

wound his feelings. That's the worst of family responsibilities."

The footsteps mounted the basement stairs unevenly and with a suggestion of a stagger in them.

"What! Connor taken to drink?" thought Jacob with sinful amusement. "Wonder where he found it. There is hope, still!"

The old servitor puffed into sight half carrying, half dragging a huge clothes-basket.

"What's that?" demanded Jacob.

"Your mail, sir."

"Is that all?" asked the other, with a sardonicism which was lost upon Connor's matter-of-fact mind.

"No, sir. There's another half-basket downstairs."

"Good Lord! What'll I do with it?"

"If I may suggest, sir, it ought to be read."

"Sound idea! You read it, Connor."

"Me, sir?"

"Certainly. I don't feel up to it. I'm tired. Strain of travel and all that sort of thing. Besides" — he cast a glance of repulsion upon the white heap — "this suggests work. And you know my principles regarding work."

"Yes, sir." Connor rubbed his ear painfully. Of course the master was joking. Always a great one for his joke, he was. But —

"There's a special delivery quite at the top, sir, marked 'Immediate.' Don't you think that perhaps —"

"Oh, all right: *all* right! If I've got to begin I may as well go through."

Having, like some thousands of other young Americans, departed from his native land and normal routine of life for a long period on important business of a muddy, sanguinary, and profoundly wearisome nature, concerning which he had but the one wish, namely, to forget the whole ugly but necessary affair as swiftly and comprehensively as possible, Mr. Jacob Remsen had deemed it wise to cut loose from home considerations as far as feasible; but he now reflected that he had perhaps made a mistake in having no mail forwarded. Well, there was nothing for it but to make up for arrears. He took off his coat and plunged in. The "immediate" special he set aside, to teach it, as he stated to the acquiescent Connor, not to be so infernally assertive and insistent, while he ran through a few scores of communications, mainly

devoted to inviting him to dinners and dances which had passed into the shades anywhere from a year to eighteen months previously.

"Now, I'll attend to you," said he severely to the special. "Only, don't brag about your superior importance, next time."

He opened it and glanced at the heading.

"Connor," said he, "this is from Mr. Bentley."

"Yes, Mr. Jacob."

"He says it is necessary for him to see me without delay."

"Yes, sir."

"Do you believe, Connor, that it is really as necessary as he pretends for Mr. Bentley to see me without delay?"

"Mr. Bentley is your lawyer, sir," pointed out Connor firmly. "If he says so, sir, I think it would be so."

"You're wrong, Connor; you're wrong! This letter is dated just seven weeks ago. As I have n't seen Mr. Bentley yet, and am still in good health and spirits, it can't have been vitally necessary that he see me without delay, can it? Necessity knows no law, Connor, and law knows no necessity that can't wait seven weeks."

"Mr. Bentley has been telephoning, sir, almost every day."

"Has he? Why did n't you tell me?"

"I tried to inform you about several telephone messages, Mr. Jacob —"

"So you did, when you met me at the pier."

"And you told me if the telephone annoyed me, to have it taken out, sir."

"Right; right; perfectly right! Did you have it taken out?"

"No, sir."

"Then it does n't annoy you?"

"No, Mr. Jacob —"

"What a blessing is philosophic calm! I'll take pattern by you and learn not to let it annoy me, either. That's it ringing now. Let it ring. Are my dinner clothes laid out?"

"Yes, sir. And, beg pardon, sir; I think that's the doorbell not the 'phone. It'll be Mr. Bentley. I took the liberty of 'phoning him, sir, that you'd be here in time to dress for dinner—"

"His blood be on your head. Let him in, Connor."

Mr. Herbert Bentley, of Bench & Bentley, a huge, puffy man of fifty, rolled into the

room, shook hands warmly with Remsen, went through the usual preliminary queries as to health, recent experience, and time of return, and then attacked the matter in hand.

"How's your family pride, Jacob?"

"Languid."

"It's likely to be stirred up a bit."

"Some of us been distinguishing ourselves?"

"Not specially. But your cousins are threatening a will contest."

"If they want to pry me loose from this grisly mausoleum," observed Jacob, with an illustrative wave of the hand around the gloomful drawing-room, "I'll listen to terms."

"Nothing of that sort. The house is yours as long as you fulfill the terms of your grandfather's will."

"Then what's the contest to me? Let my amiable cousins choke themselves and each other with law —"

"It's a question of your Great-Uncle Simeon's estate. They want you as a witness."

"For what?"

"To prove the old boy's insanity."

"Who says he was insane?"

"They do. Was n't he?"

"Well, he was eccentric in some particulars," admitted Jacob cautiously.

"As for instance?"

"Let me think. Whenever there was a long drought he used to claim that he was a tree-toad, and he'd climb the ancestral elm up at the Westchester place and squawk for rain."

"Eccentric, as you say. Anything else?"

"He had the largest collection of tin-can labels in Westchester County. At least, he boasted that it was the largest, and I never heard any one dispute it."

"What did he do with 'em?"

"Same as any kind of a collecting bug does with his collection; nothing."

"I see. Is that all?"

"Everything I can recall except that every May Day he used to put on a high hat and a pink sash and dance around a Maypole in Central Park. As he did n't care whose Maypole it happened to be, he usually got arrested."

"I see. And the rest of the family; did they show any symptoms?"

"Nothing special."

"What do you mean, special? Come, out with it!"

"Of course there was my poor old maiden aunt, Miss Melinda. You've heard of her?"

"Only as a name."

"She did her best to change that. When she was fifty-four she eloped with the coachman. Only they could n't get any one to marry 'em, so she had to come home."

"What was wrong? Was the coachman married already?"

"No. But he was a trifle colored."

"Interesting line of relatives you carry. What about the remainder of the tribe?"

"Just about the usual run of old families, I guess. One of the other aunts used to do a little in the anonymous letter line and break up happy families. Then, of course, Cousin Fred used to pull some fairly interesting stuff when he had the d-t's, but the claim that Uncle Simeon's first wife dressed up as the Van Cortland Manor ghost is n't —"

"Enough said! I did n't ask for a new edition of the *Chronique Scandaleuse*. How would you like to tell all this to the court, and through it to the newspapers?"

"I'll see 'em d——d first!"

"All very well. But if they put you on the

stand, you'll have to tell or go to jail. And they'll put you on, for you're their one best bet. With you they can win and without you they can't."

"Then they lose. I'll skip the country rather than rake up all that dead and decayed stuff."

"How about your grandfather's will, under which you inherit this house and most of your fortune? Have you forgotten that you're required to inhabit the house, from now on, at least three months out of every six until you're married?"

"So I have. Happy alternative! Lose the house or parade the family skeletons all diked out in pink sashes and tin-can labels. When does the blasted suit come on?"

"I don't know. When I do I'll let you know. Then it's up to you either to stand a siege in the house or to light out and go into hiding, and take a chance on getting back within the three months."

"Well, Connor," said Jacob Remsen after the lawyer had left, "here's a complication for a peace-and-quiet-loving young man! How did such a respectable person as you ever come to take service in such a herd of black sheep?"

"I don't know anything about those goings-on, sir," asseverated the old man doggedly. "If they put me in jail the rest of my life I could n't remember ever hearing a word about any of 'em, sir."

"Good man! Don't you testify to anything that would tend to incriminate or degrade the memory of Uncle Simeon or any other Remsen. And neither will I. However, this is n't dressing for dinner."

Having changed, young Mr. Remsen returned to dine with Gloria Greene. He found her smiling over a note which she carefully blotted before turning from her desk to greet him.

"What did you think of my protégée?" she inquired. "I'm collecting opinions on her."

"The little Colter girl? She is n't as sniffy as she appears at first sight."

"Her name is n't Colter. And I don't know how you can judge. First sight is all that you had of her."

"Not so, fair lady. She passed me in the hallway as I was waiting for a taxi to come along. I could see her nerving herself up to say something and finally she said it."

"Well, what was it?"

"Nothing important. Just that she was sorry she could n't sing for me and that some other time she would. But she said it quite pleasantly. She has n't a bad voice."

"Effect of Lesson the First," commented the actress.

"What are you doing with that young person, Gloria? Working some of your white magic on her?"

"Just remaking life a little for her," replied the other offhandedly. "This is part of it."

She fluttered the note-paper on which she had been writing.

"What is it?" asked Remsen. "A pass to Paradise? She looked as cheered-up as if she were getting something of the kind."

"It's a commutation ticket to Hades, first-class," was the actress's Delphic response. "But the poor child won't know it till she gets there."

Chapter IV

HOPE, which is credited with various magic properties, had kindled a sickly sort of sub-glow in Darcy Cole's pasty face as she arrived at Miss Greene's address, to keep her appointment. Part of it subsided at sight of the indication that the elevator was still on strike. The remainder had vanished long before she had surmounted the four flights of stairs and stood panting dolorously before Gloria Greene. That composed person feigned polite surprise.

"Why, what's the matter, Darcy?"

"Those awful — pouf! — stairs. How — whoof-uff! — d' you ever — whoo-oo-oof! — do it?"

"Two steps at a time," explained the actress practically, "cuts the distance in half."

Darcy looked skeptical. "It would kill me," she declared.

"Very likely, as you are now. We're going to change all that."

The gleam returned into Darcy's big, dull eyes. "Yes?" said she eagerly. "How?"

"I should say," answered the actress with a carefully judicial air, "that you'd better start in by learning to give up."

"Give up what?"

"Everything that makes life worth living."

"Is it a joke?" asked Darcy, dubiously.

"Far from it. Food, for instance. You eat too much."

"Often I don't get any luncheon at all."

"And too irregularly," pursued the accuser. "You drink too much."

"Gloria! One cocktail before dinner," was the indignant response.

"And too regularly," went on the relentless judge. "One is one too many for a girl with your complexion."

"Go on," said Darcy with sullen resignation.

"You sleep too much."

"Eight hours is n't —"

"You interrupt too much," broke in the mentor severely. "You laze too much. You shirk and postpone too much. You nibble too much candy. When you feel below par you take a pill instead of a walk. Don't you?"

The girl stared. "How do you know all these things about me?"

"Read 'em in your face, of course. And a lot more, besides."

"Nobody else ever read 'em there. Not even the doctor."

"Probably he has, but is too polite to tell you all he sees, or too cynical to believe that you'd take the trouble to do anything about it if he told you. Or perhaps he just does n't see it."

"Then how do you?"

"I'm an expert, my dear young innocent. It's part of my profession to be good-looking just as it is to keep well-read and well-dressed. And a lot harder!"

"How can it be harder for you? You're beautiful just naturally."

"I'm not beautiful. Your Holcomb Lee or any other artist with a real eye could reduce my face to a mere scrap-heap of ill-assorted features. I'm reasonably pleasant to look at because I work hard at the business of being just that. And I'm going to keep on being pleasant to look at for twenty good years yet if care and clothes will do it!"

"Clothes help such a lot," sighed the girl. "When are you going to help me with mine?"

Gloria Greene looked disparagingly at the girl's slack and flaccid body.

"When you develop something to put 'em on," said she curtly.

"But I thought that if I had some nice clothes —"

"You'd develop inside them like the butterfly in the chrysalis," supplemented the other. "Unfortunately it does n't work that way with humans. Did n't I tell you yesterday that it was n't going to be easy?"

"Yes. But you're not telling me anything now. You're just — just discouraging me."

"Why, you poor-spirited little grub, you have n't even touched the outer edge of discouragement yet. Here! Can you do this?"

Lifting her hands high above her glowing head, Gloria swept them down in a long curve of beauty, until she stood bowed but with unbending knees, her pink fingers flattened on the floor.

"Of course I can't," whined Darcy.

"Try it," suggested the other enticingly. "It is n't hard."

Darcy did not stir. "I've got corsets on," said she.

"You have. Awful ones. Take 'em off."

"I will," she promised.

Performance, not promise, was what her instructor demanded. "Do it now."

With a sigh, the girl obeyed. "It makes me look sloppier than ever," she lamented, glancing toward the mirror.

"Not actually," was the counsel — of dubious comfort — from the other. "You only *feel* now as you've been looking all the time. Don't get another pair until I tell you. I'll pick 'em out if you still want them when Andy Dunne is through with you."

"Who's Andy Dunne?"

"Andy," explained the actress concisely, "is the devil."

"That's encouraging," murmured the girl.

"Anyway, you'll think he is. He's my trainer."

"Trainer! You talk as if you were a prize-fighter."

"I cut Andy's lip with a straight left once," said Miss Greene with a proud, reminiscent gleam in her eye. "It was one of the biggest moments of my life."

Taking from her desk the note which she had

described to Jacob Remsen as a commutation ticket to the last station, down-line, she handed it to Darcy. The girl read it.

ANDY: This is Miss Darcy Cole. Put her through as you did me, only more so.

GLORIA GREENE

Darcy tucked it carefully into her imitation-leather roll, saying:

"It's awfully good of you to take all this trouble for me."

"Oh, it is n't for you entirely. Call it part of my contribution to the general welfare. It gives me a pain in my artistic sense to see a woman-job spoiled; like a good picture daubed over by a bad amateur. So if I can rescue you as a brand from the burning and put you back on earth, a presentable human, I'll feel like a major of the Salvation Army. That's why I've decided to take you in hand. And may Heaven have mercy upon your body!"

"Amen!" confirmed Darcy piously, feeling for the introductory note.

"Only," added Gloria slowly, "I want to be clear on one point. I'd like to know for whom I'm really doing this."

"Why, for me, of course," said Darcy, big-eyed.

"Not for any one else?"

"Who else should there be? I told you there was n't any —"

"I know. You swore there was no man in this. Then on top of it, you rouse my darkest suspicions by acting like a school-girl yesterday and tearing your hair because the first casual man that comes along does n't gaze soulfully at you when he takes his departure."

"Gloria, I hate you! D' you mean Mr. Remsen? Surely you don't for a minute imagine —"

"No; I don't suppose Jack has anything to do with it, personally. But I seem to get a strong indication of Man as a species somewhere in the background of this business."

Pink grew Miss Darcy Cole; then red, and eventually scarlet, under Gloria's interested regard.

"You see!" exclaimed that acute person. "Come, now. Explain."

"It's — it's Maud Raines's fault," blurted Darcy.

"Agreed that it's all Maud's fault. Go on."

"No; it is n't *all* Maud's fault," corrected

Darcy with a palpable effort to do exact justice. "It's partly the British War Office's fault."

"International complications. Maud and the British War Office. Mr. Lee had better look out!"

"Not at all! It is n't Maud that the British War Office has been writing letters to."

"No? Who is it?"

"Me."

"Is this a long-distance flirtation with an official Britisher, all wound round with red tape? What kind of letters?"

"Well, not personal, exactly," reluctantly admitted the girl. "Propaganda matter. It's sent out by their press bureau. But it always comes addressed in nice, firm, man-ny handwriting."

"But why do they send to you?"

Darcy giggled. "That's the funny part of it. They must have got me confused with Dorsey Coles, the essayist. He used to live on East Fifty-Sixth Street."

"Very likely. When does the Man enter?"

"We-ell, you see, Maud and Helen were awfully curious about my English correspondent."

"Naturally."

"So I — well, I just let 'em be."

"Is that any reason why you should wear the expression of one about to confess to a cold-blooded murder?"

"Wait. You know I told you Maud had been catty about my sitting to Holcomb Lee."

"Yes."

"This is what I overheard her say to Helen, and I'm not even sure she did n't mean me to overhear. She said, 'Darcy's been sitting to Holcomb. Fancy it! Darcy as a model! I can no more imagine her being a model than I could her being engaged.' Was n't that nasty of her, Gloria!"

"It was. And you very properly smothered her with a pillow as she slept and have come here to make your confession," twinkled Gloria.

"Worse," said Darcy in a small, tremulous voice. "Much worse."

Gloria sat up straight. "No!" she cried hopefully.

"Yes. For Helen said, 'Well, somebody in England seems pretty much interested in her, anyway.' That's what put it into my head."

"I wish you'd put it into mine," said the other plaintively. "You don't seem to get any

nearer the subject of your romance, which is Man."

"Well — promise not to laugh at me, Gloria!"

"I'll try."

"Just to show 'em both, I *got* engaged."

"Darcy!"

"Yes; and one evening when both of the girls were being just a little extra peacocky over their double wedding next October and letting me understand what a favor it was to me that I was to be double maid of honor, I just up and told 'em I did n't know whether I could be as I had an important engagement to be married myself."

"Lovely! Gorgeous!"

"They jumped at the English letters. So I told them that I thought I might as well own up about the affair; how I'd met him on my vacation in Canada and helped him try out horses for the British Government, which had sent him over for that purpose when he was wounded, and we had corresponded ever since. It was awfully well done, if I do say it as should n't."

"Let me get this right," pleaded Gloria.

"You made him all up yourself, just on the basis of those war-office letters?"

"N-no. That's just the trouble."

"You *did n't* make him up?"

"N-n-not entirely."

"For Heaven's sake, do be more explicit!"

"I'm t-t-trying to," said Darcy brokenly. "I got him out of a book."

"Then he's imaginary."

"I'm afraid he's real. Awfully real."

"Darcy Cole; *what* book did you get him out of?"

"Burke's Peerage."

With one headlong plunge Gloria projected herself upon the couch where she wallowed ecstatically among the pillows.

"Oh, Darcy! Darcy!" she gasped when she could achieve coherent speech. "For this I shall love you forever. I'll do more. I'll adopt you. I'll endow you. I'll — I'll canonize you. What's his name?"

"Sir Montrose Veyze, Bart., of Veyze Holdings, Hampshire, England," recited the girl formally.

Dissociating herself from a convulsed silk coverlet, Gloria straightened up. "Sir Mon-

trose Veyze," she repeated thoughtfully and relishingly. "Why that particular and titled gentleman?"

"I got to the V's before I found any one that seemed to fill the bill."

"What special qualification commended him to your favorable consideration, Miss Cole?"

"Well, he's unmarried."

"That's important."

"And he's far away. I came across that in an English magazine."

"How far?"

"Way out in the East somewhere where one of the fifty-seven varieties of left-over wars is still going on."

"So far, so good. What are you going to do with him when he comes back?"

"If I only knew!" was the miserable rejoinder. "Maybe he won't come back. Maybe something will happen to him."

"It won't. He'll bear a charmed life, just to plague you," retorted her friend with conviction. "You bloodthirsty little beast!" she added.

"The worst I wish him," said Darcy tearfully, "is an honorable military death."

"Oh! Is that all! You'd have to go into deep mourning."

"That'd be better than suicide. And I can't see anything else for me to do if he lives through. I won't confess to that Maud-cat! I won't! I won't! I won't!"

"I don't blame you. But when are you to be married?"

"Uncertain. That's the advantage of having a fiancé at war."

"You must make it after the double wedding," decided Gloria. "Just for curiosity, how did you describe him?"

"I've rather dodged that, so far. But I think I'd like to have him tall and slender and with nice, steady, friendly eyes, like Mr. Remsen."

"So would Monty, doubtless," surmised Gloria.

"*Who?*"

"Monty Veyze."

"Gloria! Do you *know* Sir Montrose Veyze?"

"Rather. I visited at his sister's last time I was in England."

"Heavens! That makes it seem so ghastly real. What's he like?"

"Round and roly-poly and red and fierce-

looking; but a good sort. And he used to be quite an admirer of mine. I do think, Darcy, that with the whole of Burke's Peerage to choose from you might have refrained from trespassing on my preserves. It is n't clubby of you!"

"You can have him!" cried the girl desperately. "Any one can have him! I don't care how round and red and —"

"He's rather far from your picture of him, certainly. Not a bit like Jack Remsen. So you approve of Jack, do you?"

"I thought him awfully attractive," said Darcy shyly.

"Oh, Jack's a dear. It's a pity about his money."

"Has he lost it?"

"No. Got it. Too much. Without it he might make a real actor. He's the best amateur in New York to-day. But — an amateur."

"What does he do?"

"Dabbles in artistic things. And plays at being everybody's little sunbeam. Never mind Jack. It's the imaginary Sir Montrose Veyze that we've got to figure on."

"Oh, do tell me what to do with him!" implored the too-inventive Darcy.

"Keep him. Prize him above rubies and diamonds. Nothing has given me a laugh like that for a year."

"But if —"

"Let the future take care of its ifs. Who can tell what will turn up? Fate is kind to creative genius. And I'm going to assist Fate if I can. I'll make you a bargain, Darcy, for half of your beautiful, inspiring, heaven-sent lie. You take me into equal partnership in it, and I'll be your little personal Guide to Health and Beauty until we've made a job of you. But you've got to promise on honor to keep up the Veyze myth, if I'm to be partner and half owner in it, until I agree to drop it. Is it a bargain?"

The light of unholy, reckless adventure shot into Darcy's pale eyes.

"It's a bargain," she agreed solemnly.

Chapter V

SUCH demoniac attributes as Mr. Andy Dunne might possess lurked in the background on the occasion of Darcy's first visit. Smothering her misgivings, the girl had mounted the steps of the old-fashioned house just off Sixth Avenue, undistinguished by any sign or symbol of the mystic activities within, and presented Gloria's letter. Mr. Dunne revealed himself as a taciturn gentleman in funereal trousers and a blue sweater, who suggested facially an athletic monk of reserved and misanthropic tendency. He led her into a severely business-like office sparsely furnished with a desk and two hard and muscular-looking chairs, with liberal wall ornamentations of the championship Baltimore "Orioles" ("A. Dunne, 2d b." in clear script on the frame), pictures of Mr. Dunne and other worthies in sundry impressive and hostile postures, and a large photograph signed, with a noble flourish, "Yours truly, John L. Sullivan." It was the crowning glory of Mr. Dunne's professional

career that he had trained the "Big Feller" for his final championship fight.

Having perused his former pupil's brief epistle, Mr. Dunne cast an appraising glance over the neophyte.

"Full course?" he inquired.

"Yes, please."

"How long?"

"Six months."

The girl produced a roll of bills and laid them on the desk. Mr. Dunne counted them twice. With a stony face and in a highly correct hand he made out a receipt.

"Six months. Paid in advance," he stated. "D' je meanter pay it all?"

"Y-y-yes. Is n't it usual?" queried Darcy, wondering whether she was shattering some conventionality of this unknown world.

"Nope. Three's usual. What's the big idea?"

"Gloria — that is Miss Greene told me to pay it all in advance because if I did n't I might get tired of it and back out. But I shan't."

From between Mr. Dunne's hard-set lips issued a vowel-less monosyllable such as might be enunciated by a contemplative bulldog engaged in self-communion.

"Grmph!" said Mr. Dunne, which, Darcy decided, might mean much or little. "Friend o' Miss Greene's?" he inquired after a pause.

"Yes."

"*Some* lady!" said Mr. Dunne with an approach to enthusiasm which Darcy was never thereafter to experience from his repressive spirit, save only when he spoke of the "Big Feller."

"Is n't she wonderful!" acquiesced Darcy.

Mr. Dunne rubbed his lower lip with a reminiscent and almost romantic gleam in his heavy-browed eyes, and the girl with difficulty suppressed a query as to whether that was the spot whereon Gloria had landed her triumphant left. Emerging from his reverie he issued his first direction. "Stannup, please."

Darcy rose and stood, consciously loppish, while the trainer circumnavigated her twice.

"Grmph!" he grunted. "When yah wanna begin?"

"At once, please."

"Gotta outfit?"

"No."

"Gittit." He thrust a typed list into her hand. "How much you weigh?"

"I don't know."

"Yah don't *know?*"

"Somewhere about a hundred and fifty, I suppose."

"Yah *suppose.* Grmph!" The exclamation was replete with contempt. "Come into the shop."

She followed him into a big airy room flooded with overhead light, and filled with all sorts of mechanism. Obedient to a gesture she stepped on the scales. Mr. Dunne busied himself with a careful adjustment.

"You'll strip a hunner'n fifty-two," he declared.

Darcy vaguely felt as if she were being accused of murder. She felt even worse when the iron-faced Mr. Dunne made an entry in a little notebook.

"Will I?" she said faintly.

"Not long," retorted the trainer.

He strode across the room and set foot upon a huge, ungainly leather ball. It seemed but the merest touch that he gave. Nevertheless the ball left that spot hurriedly, rolled across to Darcy and encountered her shins with an impact that all but crumpled her flabby legs beneath her.

"Know what that is?" demanded the trainer.

"I'm afraid I don't."

"Medicine-ball. Little pill. You'll *like* the little pill."

Prophetic voices within Darcy told her that this was improbable: but she mildly assented. The pulley-weights were next called to her attention and identified.

"What do I do with them?" she inquired with a proper show of interest.

"Pull 'em up."

"I see. And then what?"

"Let 'em down."

It seemed to Darcy a profitless procedure, but she wisely refrained from saying so, and was glad that she did when Mr. Dunne added in a tone which emphasized the importance of the transaction:

"A coupla hundred times."

Subsequently the neophyte was introduced to the dumb-bells, the Indian-clubs, the rings, the hand-ball court, the rowing-machine — she earned a glance of contempt by asking where it rowed to — the punching-bag, which she disliked at sight, the finger-grip roller, the stationary bicycle (which also got you nowhere), the

boxing-gloves, and a further bewildering but on the whole inspiriting array of machines for making one strong, happy, beautiful, and healthy to order. Somewhere in the girl's consciousness lurked a suspicion that the apparatus could n't be expected to do all the work: that there were patient and perhaps strenuous endeavors expected of the operator. But of the real rigors of the awaiting fate she had but the faintest glimmer.

As she was leaving, a door bumped violently open and there appeared in the "shop" a horrific female figure. It was that of a fat blonde with four sweaters on. Her cheeks were puffy red, her eyes jutted poppily from the sockets, and her jowls dripped. As a slave, treading the unending grind of the mill, the apparition set herself to trot heavily around the circumference of the room. And as she ran she blubbered.

"Oh, poor thing!" cried Darcy under her breath. "What's the matter with her?"

"Nothin'," said Mr. Dunne indifferently.

"But there must be something," insisted the newcomer aghast.

"Fat," vouchsafed Mr. Dunne. "They mostly take it hard — at the start," he con-

descended to add. "She's only been at it a month."

A month! Darcy's heart sank within her. She began to see why Gloria had insisted on a binding prepayment. Did Gloria, splendid, vigorous Gloria, have to go through that stage? Was this the inevitable purgatory through which all flesh must pass to reach the goal? Could she, Darcy, conscious of flaccidity of body and spirit, endure —

"Tomorra at three," cut in Mr. Dunne's brusque tones.

Impersonal and coldly business-like though Andy Dunne might appear to the apprehensive novice, he was an artist in his line, and took a conscientious interest in his clients. Inspired thereby, he called up Gloria Greene and requested information.

"Spoiled child," was the diagnosis which he received over the 'phone.

"Fool parents?" he inquired.

"No."

"Rich feller?"

"Nothing of that sort."

"What's spoilt her, then?"

"She's spoilt herself."

"That's bad."

"But she does n't know it."

"That's worse."

"So I've sent her to you, Andy." And Gloria outlined her hopeful programme for Darcy.

"Grmph!" snorted the trainer. "Will she stand the gaff, d' yah think?"

"She'll have to," chuckled Gloria. "If she does n't, let me know. I've got a hold over her."

The mere process of purchasing has an inspiriting effect upon the feminine psychology. By the time Darcy had acquired her simple gymnasium outfit, her fears were forgotten in optimism. With such appropriate clothes the experiment must be a success! Proudly she arrayed herself in them, upon arrival at Mr. Andy Dunne's academy at the hour set; the close-fitting, rather scratchy tights, the scant and skirtless trousers, the light canvas shoes, the warmly enveloping sweater, and the rubber cap to keep her hair from interfering with her exertions. Thus appareled, Darcy quite esteemed herself as an athlete. She could already feel her muscular potentialities developing beneath the rough, stimulant cloth. She thought

lightly of the various apparatus awaiting her in the "shop"; playthings of her coming prowess. She would show Mr. Andy Dunne what an apt and earnest devotee of the vigorous life could achieve. Thus uplifted she went forth with a confident smile to meet the man who, for weary months, was to fill a large part of her life.

At sight of her Mr. Dunne, schooled though he was in self-restraint, barely suppressed a groan of pained surprise. That garb which had so pleased Darcy, however much it may have been an inspiration to her, was a revelation to the dismayed eyes of her instructor. To Gloria Greene, one of the few people with whom he forgot his reticence, he afterwards made his little plaint.

"If they're fat, I can sweat 'em. If they're skinny, I can pad 'em with muscle. But this squab, she's fat and skinny *all* in the wrong places."

Half hopeful that he might discover some disabling symptom, he tested her heart and her breathing. All was normal. He noted her yellowish eyes, her sallow skin, the beginning of a fold under her chin, the slackness of her posture.

"How old are yah?" he demanded.

"Just twenty-one."

"Grmph!" barked Mr. Dunne, in a tone which unflatteringly suggested surprise, but also relief. "Well we gotta getta work."

How pleasurable was that hour's exercise to Darcy! With what delight did her unforeboding spirit take to the ways of a hardy athleticism! Never could she have imagined it so easy. No sooner was she weary of one kind of a trial, dumb-bells, Indian-clubs, or pulleys, than, when her breath began to come short, the watchful instructor stopped her and, after a rest, set her to something else. Her skin pricked and glowed beneath the close but unrestricting suit. Little drops of moisture came out on her face and were gayly brushed away. She could feel herself breathing deeper, her blood running faster and fuller in her veins, her muscles suppling along the bones. She hurled the medicine-ball with fervor. She attacked the punching-bag with ferocity. She swung at the elusive little hand-ball with a violence unhampered by any sense of direction. From time to time she threw a glance, hopefully inviting approval, at the stonily watchful visage of Mr. Andy Dunne.

The approval did not manifest itself. Darcy, had she but known it, was going through that schedule of the mildest type known derisively to Andy's academy as "the consumptive's stunt." At the conclusion of a trot three times around the room which she conceived herself as performing with a light and springy step ("like a three-legged goat" was Mr. Dunne's mental comparison), that gentleman said, "Nuff," a word which later was to rank in his pupil's consciousness as the one assuaging thing in an agonized world. The regulation first-day's-end catechism then took place.

"How d' yah feel?"

"Fine!"

"'s good! Lame?"

"Not a bit."

"Yah'll stiffen up later. Don't let it bother yah. Hot bath in the morning."

"All right."

"Same time day after tomorra." He busied himself replacing the deranged apparatus. "How's the appetite?" he asked carelessly.

"It has n't been so very good."

"No? Try it on this."

"Diet for Miss D. Cole," was typed across

the top of a meager-looking list of edibles and what that young lady would have considered inedibles, which she found herself conning.

"Is that *all?*" she inquired dismally.

"Take as much as yah want of it," returned Mr. Dunne generously.

"But — I mean — it does n't look very nice."

"The Big Feller trained on it," observed the other with an air of finality. "What's wrong with it?"

"Why — why — it's — well — monotonous," explained the girl. "There is n't a sweet thing in it. No cakes. No desserts. Not even ice-cream. Why can't I have a little sweets?"

"Because," answered Mr. Dunne, "yah got creases in your stomach."

Darcy started. "No! Have I?" she asked, vaguely alarmed as to what profound digestive catastrophe that might portend.

"Well, have n't yah? About there — and there — and prob'ly there." Mr. Dunne drew an illustrative and stubby forefinger thrice vertically across his own flat abdomen. "Look to-night and yah'll see 'em."

"Oh!" gasped Darcy, turning fiery red, for

it is one of our paradoxical conventions that a young lady may discuss the inside of her stomach without shame, but not the outside.

Mr. Dunne regarded the blush with disfavor.

"Look-a-here," he said bluntly. "Yah need n't get rattled."

"But — I — I — did n't —"

"Cut the school-girl stuff. Yah 'r my pupil. I'm yahr trainer. That's all there is *to* it, if we're going to get along comfortable. Get me?"

"Yes," said Darcy. "I won't be silly again. And I'll try and mind the diet."

Vastly to her surprise and gratification, the neophyte arose on the following morning without severe symptoms of lameness. Here and there an unsuspected muscle had awakened to life and to mild protest over the resurrection. But on the whole Darcy felt none the worse for her experience. She began to surmise that she was one of that physically blessed class, a born athlete. If beauty, vigor, and health were to be achieved at no harder a price than this, they were almost like a gift of the good fairies. The only unusual phenomena she observed as a result of her introspection were a lack of interest in her food, which she set down to the discredit

of the diet, and a tendency to fall asleep over her work. She went to bed early that night, quite looking forward to the morrow's exercise.

Nature has a stock practical joke which she plays on the physically negligent when they begin training. Instead of inflicting muscular remorse on the morning after, she lets the bill run for another twenty-four hours and then pounces upon the victim with an astounding accumulation of painful arrears. Opening her eyes on that second day after Mr. Dunne's mild but sufficient schedule — the one muscular movement she was able to make without acute agony — Darcy became cognizant that every hinge in her body had rusted. She attempted to swing her legs out of bed, and stuck, with her feet projecting out from the clothes, paralyzed and groaning. From the bedroom next to Darcy's alcove, Helen Barrett heard the sounds of lamentation and tottered drowsily in.

"What ever is the matter, Darcy?"

"I can't get up" moaned the victim.

"What is it? Are you ill?"

"No! No! I'm all right. Only —"

"Get your legs back in bed." The kindly Helen thrust back the protruding limbs, thereby

wringing from the sufferer a muffled shriek which brought Maud Raines to the scene.

"It's rheumatism, I think," explained Helen to the newcomer. "Or else paralysis."

"It is n't," denied Darcy indignantly.

"What is it, then?"

Racked by all manner of darting pains and convulsive cramps, Darcy began the cautious process of emerging from bed. "Do be good — ugh!" she implored. "And don't — ooch! — ask questions — and draw me a boiling hot bath — ow-w-w! — and help me into it — oh-h-h-h — *dear!*"

Greatly wondering they followed the sufferer's directions, got her duly en-tubbed, and ensconced themselves outside the door, which they left carefully ajar for explanations. All they got for this maneuver was an avowal of the bather's firm intention of spending the rest of the day in the mollifying water.

"If you want to be really nice," she added, "you might bring my coffee and rolls to me here."

"Well, really!" said Maud indignantly, for this was a reversal of the normal order of things in Bachelor-Girls' Hall. As the homely member

of an otherwise attractive trio, Darcy had been, by common consent, constituted the meek and unprotesting servitor of the other two. Thus do relics of Orientalism persist among the most independent race of women known to history.

Darcy accepted the rebuff. "It does n't matter," said she, with a quaver of self-pity. "I can't have coffee. I can't have hot rolls. I can't have anything."

Her two mates exchanged glances. "Darcy, you've got to see a doctor."

"I have n't! I won't!"

"But if you can't move and can't eat —"

"I'm much better now. Really I am," declared the other, alarmed at the threat of a physician, who might suspect the truth and give her away to the others. "I'm going to dress."

Which she did, at the price of untold pangs. Breakfast passed in a succession of questioning silences and suspicious glances, but Darcy guarded her tongue. To reveal the facts and what lay behind them would be only to invite discouragement and dissuasion if not actual ridicule. After the frugal and tasteless ordeal of hominy without sugar, followed by one egg without butter, she limped into the front room

and set herself doggedly to the elaboration of a new design for B. Riegel & Sons. Notwithstanding the legacy, she could not afford to neglect the economic side of life whilst fostering the physical. Her special course in the development of charm, *via* the muscle-and-sinew route, she perceived, was going to take longer than she had foreseen. Already she felt that the schedule ought to be radically relaxed. Her unfitness to take the lesson set for that afternoon was obvious. Next week, perhaps — though, on the whole, she inclined to the belief that she should have about ten days to recuperate.

She would write to Mr. Dunne and explain. No; she would telephone him. Better still, she would go up to the Academy of Tortures in person and exhibit to the proprietor's remorseful eyes the piteous wreck which he had made of her blithe young girlhood.

She went. Mr. Andy Dunne regarded the piteous wreck without outward and visible signs of distress.

"Yah got five minutes," he remarked emotionlessly, glancing at the clock.

"I can't possibly go on to-day," said Darcy firmly.

"No?"

"Every bone in my body creaks. I have n't got a muscle that is n't sore. I ache in places that I did n't even know I *had*. Why, Mr. Dunne," she declared impressively, as a conclusion to the painful inventory, "if I tried to go through those exercises again to-day, I'd die!"

"Grmph!" said Mr. Dunne, indicating that he was unimpressed.

"I c-c-c-can't do it and I won't!" said Darcy, like a very naughty child.

"Yah paid me three hundr'n sixty dollars, did n't yah?"

"Yes," replied Darcy, her heart sinking, at the recollection of the sum which she had invested in assorted agonies.

"Did yah think that was going to *buy* yah what yah 'r after?"

Darcy gulped dismally.

"It ain't. Money can't buy it. Yah gotta have gu— grit." Mr. Dunne achieved the timely amendment in the middle of the stronger qualification.

Darcy's mind went back to Gloria Greene's preachment upon the text of "grit": "You

don't know what the word means, yet." Apparently she was in a fair way to find out.

"Two minutes gone," announced the trainer's inexorable voice.

How she did it she never knew. But under impulsion of the sterner will, she got into her gymnasium suit and was on the floor only three minutes past the hour. The apparatus which she had at first encountered with so much interest and curiosity now had a sinister effect of lying in wait like the implements of a dentist's office. She speculated, with a shrinking of her whole frame, upon which one would be selected as the agency of the initial agony. Giving them not so much as a look, Mr. Andy Dunne led her to a large, rough mat and bade her stretch out on her back.

"Lift the left foot in the air," he directed.

Darcy did so, with caution.

"Higher!" said Mr. Dunne.

"Oo-yee!" lamented Darcy.

"Back. Lift the right foot in the air."

Darcy obeyed without enthusiasm.

"Higher!" said Mr. Dunne.

"Ow-*wow!*" mourned Darcy.

"Back. Lift both feet in the air."

"I can't!" said Darcy.

"Yah gotta!" said Mr. Dunne.

Two wavering, quivering legs rose slowly from the mat, attained an angle of forty-five degrees, and dropped back to earth with a thud. Their owner had been forcibly reminded of the three creases in her stomach by the fact that they had unanimously set to writhing and grinding upon each other in fiery convolutions of protest, resultant upon the unwonted angle of the legs.

"Higher!" commanded the pitiless Mr. Dunne.

"Can't!"

"Gotta!"

With a spasmodic heave, the victim attained perhaps fifty degrees of elevation, and straightened out, gasping. Next her instructor had her sit up erect from a flat position, without aid from hands or elbows, whereat all the muscles in her back, thighs, and abdomen, hitherto unawakened, roused themselves and yelled in chorus. Then he had her repeat the whole devastating process from the first before he spoke the word of reprieve.

"Nuff!"

Darcy rolled over on her face and lay panting.

"How d' yah feel?"

"Awful!" gasped Darcy.

"Still a bit stiff?"

"A bit! Oh-h-h-h!"

"Then we'll do it all again," said Mr. Dunne cheerfully. "Nothin' like light exercise to loosen up the human frame."

For that "light" Darcy could cheerfully have slain him. Nobody since the world began, she felt convinced, neither gladiator of the classic arena nor the mighty John L. himself, had ever undergone such a fearsome grilling and lived. And now there was more to come. Over the twistings and turnings, the arm-flexures, the hoppings and skippings, the ting-ling of the outraged muscles, the panting of the overtaxed lungs, let us draw a kindly curtain.

When the horrid hour was over, Darcy in her cold shower felt numb. Whether she could ever manage to get home on her own disjointed feet seemed doubtful. But she did. She went to bed at eight o'clock that night, having eaten almost nothing, in the firm conviction that she never would be able to get up in the morning without help, and probably not with it!

Sleep such as she had not known in years submerged her. Roused late by her companions, she moved first an arm, then a leg, tentatively. No penalty attached to the experiment. With a low, anticipatory groan she sat up slowly in bed. The groan was a case of crying before she was hurt. She began to feel herself cautiously all over. Her skin was a little tender to the touch, and she noted with interest that the blood ran impetuously to whatever spot on the surface her exploring fingers pressed. But of that crippling lameness, that feeling of the whole bodily mechanism being racked and rusted, there remained only a trace. In its place was left a new variety of pang which Darcy pleasantly identified. She was ravenously hungry.

Maud Raines observed to Helen Barrett after breakfast that any one who could bolt plain oatmeal the way Darcy did must have the appetite of a pig, and no wonder she was fat and slobby. But Andy Dunne, calling up Gloria to report progress, thus delivered his opinion:

"You know that squab you sent me, Miss Greene?"

"Yes."

"She wanted to quit."

"No! Did she do it?"

"I bluffed her out of it. And say, Miss Greene!"

"Yes, Andy."

"There may be something to that kid."

"Glad you think so."

Said Andy Dunne, expert on the human race slowly, consideringly, and more prophetically than he knew:

"I kinda think there's fighting stuff somewheres under that fat."

Chapter VI

HAD Andy Dunne's surmise been laid before Darcy, it might have brought sorely needed encouragement to her soul as the regenerative process went on. True she had presently passed the first crisis which athletic regimen develops for the untrained, and which is purely muscular. She no longer swung to and fro, a helpless pendulum, between the agonies of apprehension and the anguish of action. The steady exercise was telling in so far as her muscles were concerned; she had still to face the test of discipline. In this second and sterner crisis, Andy Dunne could help her but little. It was a question of her own power of will, a will grown slack and flabby from lack of exercise. Ahead of her loomed, only dimly discerned as yet, the ordeal of strenuous monotony; the deadly-dull, prolonged grind wherein endurance, as it hardens, is subjected to a constantly harsher strain, until the soul revolts as, in the earlier stage, the body had rebelled.

A subject like Gloria Greene, high and fine of spirit, the sage Mr. Dunne could have eased

through the difficult phase by appeals to her pride and to the sense of partnership which the successful trainer must establish between himself and his pupil. With Darcy this was impracticable because Andy Dunne, as he would have admitted with a regretful grin, was "in wrong." Darcy enthusiastically hated him.

At first sight she had estimated him as a stern spirit. Through successive changes that reckoning had been altered to "harsh," then "brutal," and now "Satanic." Gloria's judgment of her note of introduction as "a commutation ticket to Hades, first class," was amply borne out.

Professionally Mr. Dunne's discourse tended ever to the hortatory and corrective. He was a master of the verbal rowel.

"Keep it up!" "Again!" "Ah-h-h, put some punch in it!" "Yah ain't *haff* trying!" "Go wan! Yah gotta do better'n 'at!" And, occasionally, "Rotten!"

Worse still was a manner he had of regarding her with an expression of mild and regretful wonder whilst giving voice to his bulldoggish "Grmph!" in a tone indicating only too plainly that never before was conscientious trainer so bored and afflicted with such an utterly incom-

petent, inefficient, and generally hopeless subject as the daily withering Darcy.

In lighter moments he would regale her with reminiscences of the Big Feller and his eccentricities in and insubordinations under training, while Darcy would lie, panting and spent, on the hard floor, wondering regretfully why the Big Feller had n't killed Mr. Dunne when opportunities must have been so plentiful. Then, just as her labored breathing would begin to ease, the taskmaster in Mr. Dunne would awaken, the call "Time" would sound like doom to her ears, and she would set to it again, arching on her back, rolling on her stomach (where the three creases were beginning to flatten), yanking at overweighted pulleys, interminably skipping a loathly rope, standing up like a dumb ten-pin before the ponderous medicine-ball which Mr. Dunne hurled at her, punching at an elusive and too often vengeful bag, rowing an imaginary boat against wind, wave, and every dictate of her weary body, and finally running silly circles around the room like a demented cat, until the monitor uttered the one, lone word of pity in his inquisitorial vocabulary: "Nuff!"

Had all this deep-wrung sweat of brow and soul produced any definable effect, Darcy could have borne it with a resigned spirit. It did n't. Four times a week she went through the hideous grind, and nothing happened. Each night she went to bed early and after profound sleep had to get up out of the cuddly warmth into a shudderingly cold bath — and nothing happened. She gave up the before-dinner cocktail and with it what little zest she had for her deadly plain diet — and nothing happened. She denied her sweet tooth so much as one little bite of candy — oh, but that was a bitter deprivation — and nothing happened. To her regimen at the gymnasium she added a stint of simple but violent house exercises on off days — and nothing happened. Life, which she had supposed, in her first flush of hopeful enthusiasm for the new régime, would be one grand, sweet song, was, in fact, one petty, sour discord — wherein nothing happened. This was quite right and logical, had Darcy but known it. Layers of fat, physical and moral, accumulated through years of self-coddling, are not worked off in a week or a month.

There came a day when something did hap-

pen. There always does. It was not of that order of occurrences which can be foreseen by the expert eye. It seldom is. Andy Dunne, honestly and simply intent on earning his money, had been unusually exigent. Besides, Darcy had a nail in her shoe. Besides, Mr. Riegel had been curtly critical of her latest and most original design as "new-fangled." Besides, Maud was becoming satirically curious as to where she was spending so many afternoons. Besides, it was a rotten day. There was no light on earth or in heaven!

"What's the use of it all, anyway!" thought Darcy to herself, for perhaps the fiftieth time, but rather more fervently than before.

As if in exasperation of her agnostic mood, the preceptor, in the half-time intermission, had suggested not less, but more work!

"Yah'r gettin' stale," observed Mr. Dunne, which Darcy thought a hopeful beginning.

"I feel so," she said.

"There's a clock," Mr. Dunne informed her, "at Fifty-Ninth and Eighth."

Darcy waited.

"There's another at a Hundred'n Tenth and Seventh," pursued the chronometrical Mr. Dunne, and fell into calculating thought.

Darcy waited again.

"Yah leave Fifty-Ninth at 4.20 P.M."

"When?"

"Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays."

"Oh!" said Darcy blankly.

"And yah get to a Hundred'n-Tenth in time to hear that clock strike 5."

"What! Walk? Nearly three miles in forty minutes?"

"No," said Mr. Dunne thoughtfully.

"Then, how —"

"Yah'd better run part way, or yah won't make it on time."

"You want to kill me!" declared the petulant and self-pitying Darcy.

"Grmph!" said Mr. Dunne.

"Suppose it rains?" put forth Darcy desperately.

"Then yah'll get wet," was Mr. Dunne's reasonable answer.

"And catch my death riding back in the bus."

"Don't ride. Walk. I'm giving this to yah for fresh air."

"But Mr. Dunne —"

"Time!"

It may have been this fresh grievance which lay heavy upon Darcy's chest, clogging her breathing and slowing her suppled muscles. She was conscious of doing less well than usual — and of not caring, either! The medicine-ball was heavier and more unwieldy than ever. The punching-bag, instinct with a demoniac vitality, came back at her on a new schedule and bumped her nose violently, a mortifying incident which had not occurred since the first week. The despicable little hand-ball, propelled by her trainer, bounded just a fraction of an inch out of her straining reach, and when she did hit it, felt as soggy as sand and as hard as rock and raised stone-bruises on her hands. She even pinched her thumb in the rowing-machine, which is the zenith of inexpertness. With every fresh mishap she became more self-piteous and resentful and reckless. Andy, the Experienced, would have ascribed all this to that common if obscure phenomenon, an "off day," familiar to every professor whether of integral calculus or the high trapeze. Then the dreadful thing happened, and he revised his opinion.

The last, and therefore worst, five minutes of the grind had come. Darcy lay on the mat

going through the loathed body-and-limb-lifting while Andy Dunne exhorted her to speed up.

"Now the legs. Come on. Hup!"

Something in Darcy went on strike.

"Can't," she said.

"Grmph! What's matter?"

"Won't!" said Darcy.

From the corner of a hot and rebellious eye she could see overspreading her trainer's face that familiar expression of contemptuous and weary patience. Anything else she could have stood. But *that* — that was the spark that fired the powder. Stooping over, the trainer laid hold, none too gently, on one inert heel.

Heaven and earth reversed themselves for Mr. Andy Dunne. Also day and night, for a galaxy of stars appeared and circulated before his mazed eyes. The walls and the ceiling joined in the whirl, to which an end was set by the impact of the floor against the back of his head. For one brief, sweet, romantic moment Andy Dunne was back in the training-ring with the Big Feller and that venerated and mulish right had landed one on his jaw. But why, oh, why, should the mighty John L. thereupon burst into hysterical sobbing? And if it was n't the Big

Feller, who was it making those grievous noises?

Mr. Dunne sat up, viewed a huddled, girlish form trying unsuccessfully to burrow headforemost out of sight in the hard mat, and came to a realization of the awful fact. With all the force of her newly acquired leg muscles, the meek Miss Cole had landed a galvanic kick on his unprotected chin. For a moment he stared in stupefaction. Then he arose and went quietly forth into his own place, where he sat on a chair and rubbed his chin and thought, and presently began to chuckle, and kept it up until the chuckle grew into a laugh which shook his tough frame more violently than had the unexpected assault.

"Well, I *am* d——d!" said Mr. Dunne. "The little son-of-a-gun!"

Meanwhile Darcy lay curled up like a quaking armadillo. Probably Andy Dunne would kill her. She did n't much care. Life was n't worth living, anyhow. She was through. The one pleasant impression of her whole disastrous gymnasium experience was the impact of her heel against that contemptuous chin.

She opened one eye. Andy Dunne was not

where he should have landed as the result of the revolution which he had been performing when he whirled from her view. She opened the other eye. Andy Dunne was not anywhere. He had vanished into nothingness.

With all the sensation of a criminal, Darcy rose, dressed, and fled. She fled straight to Gloria Greene. That industrious person was, as usual, at work, and as usual found time to hear Darcy's troubles. What she heard was gaspy and fragmentary.

"Gloria, I've done an *awful* thing!"

"What? Out with it," commanded the actress.

"I ki-ki-ki — I can't tell you," gulped Darcy. "Mr. Dunne — I mean, I ki-ki-ki —"

"Yes," encouraged Gloria. "What awful thing have you done to Andy Dunne? Kissed him?"

"*No!* Worse."

"Oh! You ki-ki-killed him, I suppose," twinkled Gloria.

"I don't know. I hope so. I ki-ki-kicked him. I kicked him *good!*"

"Darcy! Where?"

"On the chin."

"What did he do?"

"Disappeared."

"Do I understand that you kicked him into microscopical pieces?"

"Don't laugh at me, Gloria. It's very, very serious."

"It sounds so."

"I'm done with it. Forever."

"Done with what?"

"The gymnasium. The diet. Andy Dunne. Everything."

"Oh, no, you're not."

"I am! *I am!* I YAM!" declared Darcy with progressive petulance. "I've been torturing myself for nothing. It has n't made a bit of difference. Look at me!"

Gloria looked and with difficulty concealed a smile of satisfaction. For, to her expert eyes, there was a difference, a marked difference, still submerged but obvious, beneath the surface, in movements which, formerly sluggish, were now brisk and supple, in a clear eye, and a skin which seemed to fit on the flesh where before it had sagged.

"How did you get up here?" inquired Gloria abruptly.

"Ran."

"Up the whole four flights? The elevator is working."

"D——n the elevator!" said the outrageous Darcy.

"A few weeks ago you were damning it because it would n't carry up your lazy body. Is n't there a difference now?"

"I don't care; it is n't the difference I want. I want to look like something. Gloria, I'm desperate."

"No, child. That is n't despair. It's temper."

"It's not."

"Go back to Andy's and work it off."

"I wont!"

"Very well." With a sigh for her interrupted task, Gloria selected a hat, set it carefully upon her splendid hair and pinned it in place. "You'll excuse me, won't you, my dear?" she added in tones which aroused her visitor's alarmed suspicions.

"Where are you going? To see Mr. Dunne?"

"Not at all."

Darcy's misgivings livened into something like terror.

"Where, then?"

"To see Maud and Helen."

"What for?"

"To recount to them the authentic and interesting history of Sir Montrose Veyze, Bart., hand-picked fiancé, of —"

"Gloria! You would n't be so *base!*"

"I would be just that base," returned the other in the measured tones of judgment. "But I'll give you a respite until your next training day. When is it?"

"Day after to-morrow," answered Darcy faintly.

"If you are n't at Andy's then to answer to the call of time, I'll tell the whole thing to the two fiancées with whatever extra details my imagination can provide."

Whereupon Darcy burst into tumultuous weeping, declared that she had n't a friend in the world, and did n't care, anyway, because she wished she was dead, and went forth of that unsympathetic spot with the air and expression of one spurning earth's vanities and deceptions forever. Being wise in her generation and kind, Gloria knew that the girl would go back to her martyrdom. So she called up Andy

Dunne for a conference, which concluded with this sage advice from her to him:

"This is the appointed time, Andy. When she comes back, put the screws on hard. She'll go through. If she does n't, let me know."

No scapegrace of school, led back from truancy after some especially nefarious project, ever wore a face of more tremulous abasement than Miss Darcy Cole, returning to her faithful trainer whom she had kicked in the jaw. As he entered the gymnasium a strip of court-plaster on the curve of his chin caught her fascinated attention and for the moment evicted from her mind the careful apology which she had formulated. Before she could recapture it, the opportunity was gone.

"Time!" barked Mr. Dunne.

The day's work was on.

Such an ordeal as Darcy underwent in consequence of Gloria's advice, few of Mr. Dunne's pupils other than professional athletes would have been called upon to endure, a fact which might have helped her had she known it. Not knowing it, she won through that violent hour on sheer grit. At the trainer's final "Nuff," she contrived to smile, but she could n't quite man-

age to walk off the floor. She sat down upon a convenient medicine-ball and waited for the dimness to clear. A hand fell on her shoulder and rested there with an indefinable pressure of fellowship. She looked up to see the task-master standing above her.

"Say, kid," he began. "Yah are a kid, ainche?" he broke off, a little doubtfully.

"I'm going — on — twenty-two," panted Darcy.

"Yeh, I'd figure yah about there — now. Well, I'm an old man; old enough for the father stuff. And I wanta tell yah something. I like yah. D' yah know why I like yah?"

Darcy, with brightening eye, shook her head.

"Because yah'r game," said Mr. Andy Dunne.

A voice within Darcy's heart burst into song. For the first time in her life she had been praised to the limit of a fellow being's measure. For gameness, as she well knew, was the ultimate virtue to the athlete mind. The Big Feller had been game, even in his downfall; it was that, over and above all his victories, which had enshrined him in Andy Dunne's and thousands of other stout and inexpressive hearts.

Her trainer had paid her his finest compliment.

"Yah'r game," he repeated. "I dunno exactly what yah'r out after, but I'm backin' yah to get it."

"Thank you, Mr. Dunne," said Darcy gratefully.

"Grmph!" retorted that gentleman. "Cut the Mister. Andy, to you."

"Thank you, Andy," said the recipient of the accolade.

Chapter VII

"*Rum*-tum-tum-tum-tum-tum-tiddle!"

THE voice sounded, fresh and brisk from behind the portals of the Fifty-Sixth Street eyrie. It was followed by a rapid succession of floppish noises which fell strangely upon the ears of Miss Maud Raines and Miss Helen Barrett, panting after their long ascent, outside the door. They had returned from a shopping tour at the unaccustomed hour of three when Darcy usually could rely upon having the place to herself.

"Is n't Darcy the gay young sprite!" said Helen as the song burst forth again.

"Flip-flop, flippity-floppity-*flub!*" sounded in progression across the living-room floor.

The two fiancées looked at each other in bewilderment.

"What on earth!" said Maud Raines.

Again the voice was uplifted, in familiar melody, gemmed with words less familiar:

"Rum-tum-tum-tum-tum-tum-tiddle,
I have rolled ten pounds from off my middle.

By rolling on the floor, (Flip! Flop!)
As I told you before,
Behind!
Behind!
Before!" (Floppity-flop!)

"I do believe she's *doing* it," whispered Helen in awed accents.

The voice, with its strange accompaniments, resumed:

"Rum-tum-tum-tum-tum-tum-tiddle,
I'll roll *twenty* pounds from off my middle.
I have done it before. (Floppity-flop! Thump!)
I can do it some more!" (Whoof!)

By this time Maud's key, silently inserted in the spring lock, had made connections. She threw the door open. Darcy, giving an imitation of a steam roller in full career toward the two entrants, was startled into a cry. She came to her feet with a bound, without pausing to touch so much as a finger to the floor, a detail which escaped the protruding eyes of her flatmates, and stood facing them flushed and defiant.

"Well!" said Maud Raines.

"What are you up to, Darcy?" asked Helen.

"Exercising," said Darcy blandly.

"And practicing vocal music on the side," remarked Maud.

"Oh, that 's just for breathing," exclaimed the girl.

"But what 's it all *about?*" queried Helen.

"I've gone into training."

"You! What for?"

"Oh, I don't know. Just for fun."

"You look it," was Maud's grim commentary. "Who 's training you?"

"Andy Dunne. He trained John L. Sullivan and Gloria Greene."

"And which one are you modeling yourself on?" asked Maud maliciously.

"Oh, I'd rather be like Gloria, of course," retorted Darcy easily. "But I feel more like John L."

"I think it very clever of you, Darcy," approved the kind-hearted Helen. "Englishmen are so athletic."

Darcy seized upon the convenient suggestion. "Monty is crazy for me to be a real sport," she said modestly.

"It 's a good thing he can't see you learning," remarked Maud.

"Did you ever know anything more pa-

thetic!" said Helen, when they had withdrawn, leaving Darcy to resume her exercises.

"Pathetic! Driveling foolishness! Such a figure as she cuts! And it 's all such a waste," concluded Maud, complacent in her own bright-hued prettiness.

But a more discerning eye took a different view. Holcomb Lee, who had n't seen Darcy for some weeks, had no sooner said, "Hello!" in his usual offhand way, when he came to call that evening, than he seized a pencil and demanded a sheet of paper.

"You 're always drawing Darcy!" said Maud disdainfully.

"Just that curve from the ear down," said he absently. "Something 's happened to it."

"What?" asked Maud.

"It 's come true. The way I wanted it to be. Only better."

He took Darcy into the corner, under the light, and sketched busily. As his quick glances appraised her, a look of puzzlement came into his eyes. He leaned forward, and with the inoffensive impersonality of the one-ideaed artist ran his hand lightly over her shoulder and down the arm.

"Moses!" said Holcomb Lee.

Darcy had flexed her upper arm and the long, slender muscles came up like iron.

"Training?" he asked.

Darcy nodded.

Again he regarded her subtly altered face.

"What for? The chorus?"

"Have n't I been chorus long enough?" twinkled Darcy.

"I get you," said Lee with emphasis. "You 'll make the *ingénue* hustle for her job, whoever she is. By Jinks, it 's a miracle!"

"But don't tell them," said Darcy.

"Who? The girls? Have n't they noticed? Why, a blind man could feel the difference in you ten feet away."

"You 're the only one that has noticed it so far, and you 're an artist."

"Well, I suppose the girls would n't," said the illustrator thoughtfully. "They see too much of you to recognize the change."

What Andy Dunne's exercises had so obviously wrought in muscle and condition, Andy Dunne's discipline had accomplished for character. Imperceptibly even to herself, the inner Darcy was growing strong. One result was a

new zest in her designing, taking the form of experiments aside from the beaten track which did not always meet the approval of B. Riegel, active head of B. Riegel & Sons, manufacturers of wall-paper. Now Mr. Riegel's approval, with the consequent check, was highly essential to Miss Darcy Cole's plans. And Miss Darcy Cole's attitude toward Mr. Riegel had always been acquiescent, not to say humble.

But on a particular morning, when the designer was even more alive than she was now accustomed to feel, she brought in a particular design, upon which she had spent much time and thought, and with which she was well content. Not so Mr. Riegel. Being first, last, and between times a man of business, he hardly gave a glance to the dowdy girl as she entered, but bestowed his entire attention on the sketch.

"Too blank," was his verdict.

"That makes it restful," suggested Darcy.

"Who wants restfulness? Pep! That 's what goes these days."

"It's for a sleeping-room, you know."

For all the effect upon the wall-paper man she might as well not have spoken. He set two pencil cross-marks on the design.

"Ornamentation here, and here," he directed curtly.

"I prefer it as it is," said Darcy calmly.

Two months — yes, two weeks before — Darcy would have stepped meekly out and ruined her pattern by introducing the Riegel ornamentation. But all was different now. Andy Dunne's encomium, "because yah 'r game," had put fire in her blood. There was a reflection of it in her cheeks when Mr. Riegel looked up at her in surprise and annoyance. He saw the same familiar figure in the same shabby, ill-fitting clothes. But now she was standing up inside them. And she, whose dull regard formerly drooped away from the most casual encounter, was confronting him with bright and level eyes.

"Suppose you give my way a trial," suggested this changeling.

"Mebbe you know more about this business than I do," he challenged.

"Not at all. But it's my design, after all, is n't it?" said the girl pleasantly.

Gathering it up with hands which somehow suggested protectiveness against the Philistine blight of Mr. Riegel, she bestowed it safe in her

imitation-leather roll. "I'll try to bring you another next week," she promised.

"Wait, now, a minute!" cried the perplexed employer. "What're you going to do with this one?"

"Try it on Balke & Stover."

"Leave it," he ordered. "Check'll be sent." He whirled around in his chair, presenting the broad hint of a busy back to her.

"Make it for thirty dollars, please," said Darcy to the back.

Mr. Riegel performed a reverse whirl so much more swiftly than his swivel-chair was prepared for that it was thrown off its balance, and its occupant, with a smothered yelp, beheld himself orbitally projected toward a line of open sample paints waiting on the floor for a test. Mr. Riegel's own person was the last medium in the world upon which he desired to test them, for much stress had been laid upon their lasting quality. He was sprawling out, fairly above them, beyond human help, it seemed, when something happened. Darcy, standing in that attitude of unconscious but alert poise which rigid physical training inculcates, thrust forth a slender but powerful hand, caught the de-

spairing Riegel, as it were in mid-flight, brought him up all standing, restored him to the chair and both of them to the *status quo*.

"Urf!" gasped the victim of these maneuvers. He bent a look upon Darcy which was a curious blend of wonder, skepticism, and respect. "Say," he said, "you could n't use a job in the trucking department, maybe?" Then, recovering himself, he growled: "What was that you said about thirty dollars?"

The growl had no effect. Darcy's confidence had been stiffened by the little interlude of the chair.

"My prices have gone up," she informed him.

"The devil they have! Beg y' pardon, Miss Watchername —"

"My name is Cole."

"Miss Cole. Look-a-here, now; d' you think your work is worth ten dollars more than it has been?"

"Put it this way; I think you've been paying me ten dollars too little. Don't you?"

At bottom Mr. Riegel was a fair-minded as well as a shrewd person. Moreover, he had been tremendously impressed by the unsuspected

physical prowess of this queer specimen. To catch him in mid-flight and reëstablish his equilibrium had required no mean quality of muscle. Yet this sloppy-looking girl had done it without turning a hair! And now she was striking him for a raise. He laughed aloud.

"That ain't the point," said he. "I don't; but some of my competitors might. Lessay twenty-five for the next half-dozen: after that, thirty, and this one goes, as is."

"Right!" said Darcy, composedly.

Exultant she went out into a dusk of wind and rain, such as would have swamped her spirit in misery aforetime, and fought her way joyously through it, ending her journey by taking the long flights of the apartment two steps at a time and singing as she sped. Outside the door she had noticed a taxi. In the front room she found Gloria, who had stopped on her way to the theater, stretched on the divan and talking with the turtledoves.

"I looked in to see how you were getting on," said the actress, eyeing Darcy keenly.

"Splendidly!"

"Everything all right in the gymnasium? Did Andy — er —"

"Oh, yes. It's all right," hastily broke in the girl, having no mind to hear her felonies discussed by her flat-mates. "Just as right as right can be."

"You're awfully chirpy, considering what a beast of a raw, rainy day it's been," observed Helen.

"Is it bad?" said Darcy blandly. "I suppose it is, but I hardly noticed."

"Another British mail in, I suppose," conjectured Maud. "That always brightens her up."

"If there is I have n't got anything yet," answered Darcy, who had neglected to consult the morning papers for the incoming steamship entries. Her myth involved so many supporting lies, that it was difficult and ticklish to keep it properly bolstered up.

"Has she told you about the Britisher, Gloria?" asked Helen.

"Monty Veyze? Of course. I know him."

"You know him!" cried Helen and Maud in a breath. "What 's he like?"

"Oh, he's all that Darcy thinks he is," smiled Gloria. "It 's years since I've seen him. To put it Englishwise, he was by way of being

horribly smart, then. Just where is he now, Darcy?"

"Near the Siberian frontier," said Darcy shortly. There was a gleam in Gloria's eye which she neither understood nor liked.

"In one of the twenty-two sub-wars that signalize the universal peace, I suppose," laughed the actress. "Or is it twenty-nine."

"I thought long engagements were n't the thing in England," said Maud, musingly. "Particularly in these uncertain times when — when anything might happen."

"I think that 's pretty horrid of you, Maud," retorted Darcy with carefully assumed sadness, smothering a private and murderous wish that "anything" would happen to her home-made fiancé.

"I don't mean it that way. But if I were really engaged to an Englishman on active service, I'd go over and marry him, on his very first leave."

Casual though Maud's "really" sounded, it brought red to Darcy's cheeks and a livelier gleam to Gloria's eyes. The latter turned to Darcy.

"Why not tell them?"

"Tell them what?" inquired the girl, staring at her mentor in amaze and alarm.

"All about Monty. The whole thing. You know, I claim a partnership in him."

By a mighty effort Darcy suppressed a gasp. What was Gloria up to, now?

"Go on," the actress urged. "Tell them."

"I-I can't," stammered Darcy, which was exactly what the feminine Macchiavelli on the divan was maneuvering for.

"Shy?" said she, sweetly. "Very well, then. I'll tell them. May I?"

Receiving a dubious nod, Gloria proceeded:

"Sir Montrose Veyze has finally got his leave. He'll be here about the middle of October."

(That "gone" feeling came over Darcy.)

"By the 15th?" asked Helen eagerly. "In time for our wedding?"

"No. That's the unfortunate part. We hoped we could make it a triple wedding. That's the little surprise Darcy has been waiting to spring on you."

"Can't he make it?" asked Maud. The notion of a titled adjunct to her marriage appealed strongly to her practical mind.

"Not quite. The best he can do is the 16th.

Possibly later. So they 'll be married quite quietly from my apartment and have a month's honeymoon before he goes back."

To all of which Darcy listened in the stupefaction of despair. She was roused by Helen Barrett's bear-hug of congratulations.

"Do you know," said Helen, "I have n't really quite been able to believe it up to now. Oh, Darcy, I 'm so glad for you!"

With some faltered excuse for getting out of the room, the subject of this untimely felicitation escaped. Her brain seethed with horrid conjectures. Here was a furtherance of her phantom plans for which she was wholly unprepared. Doubtless Gloria had something in mind; but what could it be? When the day of inevitable reckoning should come, Darcy could see no adequate solution other than suicide or permanent disappearance. Meanwhile Gloria was putting her to the test of the severest judgment by asking her flat-mates:

"Don't you think Darcy looks well?"

If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so likewise is the lack of it. Having become habituated to regarding their junior partner as aesthetically and femininely negligible, the other

girls failed to appreciate the vital changes that were in progress. Miracles, set under our eyes, do not arrest us. Otherwise we should all stand about in stupefaction watching trees grow.

"She looks healthy," granted Maud indifferently.

"And she's a lot more cheerful and lively," added Helen. "But she'll always be — well, just Darcy."

Being a scrupulously courteous person Miss Gloria Greene refrained from the prophetic comparison which suggested itself to her annoyed mind as appropriate, and contented herself with the inward retort:

"Oh, will she! Wait until I've dressed her. And then keep a watchful eye on your Holcomb Lees and your Paul Woods!"

On her way out Darcy pounced upon her.

"Gloria! What have you let me in for? How am I ever going to get out of it?"

"Heaven knows!" returned the actress airily.

"Don't *you* know?"

"Have n't an idea. Sufficient unto the day is — "

"Unto all the rest of my days, I should think," interrupted the dolorous Darcy.

"Engagements have to come to a head sometime, somehow," pointed out Gloria.

"But you've made this so dreadfully definite!"

"Darcy, I had to! I just could n't stand Maud's insinuation that you were n't really engaged — the cat! She as much as said that Montrose Veyze was just having a silly flirtation with you and that you took it *au grand sérieux*."

"What if she knew the awful truth?"

"Don't be afraid. She won't."

"How are we going to help it?"

"Break the engagement; there's one way. Say the word, Darcy, my child," said Gloria striking a sacrificial attitude, "and I'll go across and gather in Monty Veyze, myself, for your sake."

"Is n't there an obstacle on this side of the water?" suggested Darcy shyly, thinking of Jack Remsen.

Gloria reddened a little. "Not that any one knows of," she returned. "I am wedded to me a-r-rt."

"Anyway, if the engagement is broken, they'll say he jilted me."

"Then jilt him."

"They'd never believe it."

"Probably not," assented Gloria.

"And October is *awfully* near! I'll never dare show my face again," wailed Darcy.

"Oh, I don't know," returned the other reassuringly. "If it were your old face, now, you might be justified in not wanting to show it. Faces change, and we change with 'em, as the prophet says."

"It was n't the prophet, and he did n't say that, anyway. He said, 'Times change, and —"

"— and faces change with 'em, worse luck!" supplied the actress cheerfully. "Though all of 'em don't change for the worse. Darcy, how much do you weigh?" she demanded with an abrupt change of tone to the business-like.

"One hundred and twenty-eight and a half, as I go on the gym floor."

"That 's good enough. 'The time has come,' the walrus said, 'to talk of many things; of shoes, and shirts, and chemisettes, of hats and eke stock*ings*.'"

"Clothes!" cried Darcy, her eyes sparkling.

"Clothes. Are you prepared, in the sight of heaven and earth, to spend seven or eight hun-

dred of Aunt Sarah's hard-earned on a trousseau?"

"Oof! Don't say trousseau to me! It reminds me. Apart from that — try me!"

"All right. What are you going to do tomorrow at three?"

"Cover Central Park lengthwise and back in the even hour. Andy's orders."

"Far be it from me to interfere. Make it the day after at ten o'clock in the morning. Meet me at my place. We 'll have a sartorial orgy."

That night Darcy dreamed herself a princess.

Chapter VIII

"SELFISHNESS," says that wise and happy and altogether radiant person, Gloria Greene, "comes from lack of vitality. Most people have n't enough capital stock of vigor to live on comfortably. So you can't expect them to loan or give away any in the form of thoughtfulness for any one else. They 're paupers, poor things! The bankruptest person I ever knew had eighty thousand a year, and nothing else."

Adroitly and by indirection the proponent of this doctrine had been suggesting it to Darcy Cole, and that adaptable pupil had unconsciously absorbed much of it. The new character that she had built up out of discipline and abstinence as the weeks grew into months, the solidifying confidence in herself, the burgeoning of vigor, and the subtle development of that wondrous and mysterious quality which we term personality and which is the touchstone between our inner and outer worlds, had combined to open and broaden Darcy's life. Andy Dunne had long ago begun to take certain of

his professional problems to her and profit by her shrewd helpfulness. More than once she had, of her own initiative, laid hold on some shrinking, draggled, disheartened neophyte, such as she herself had been, who through mere helplessness had reduced Andy to wrathful despair, and, by a forced loan of will power and buoyancy, pulled her through the shallows to fair going again. On one occasion she had gone to police court with Andy on behalf of a girl who was "going wrong," the sister of one Gillig, a promising young pugilist under Andy's guidance; where she had so impressed the magistrate that (seeing her with Andy, whom he knew) he asked if she was a trainer, and hinted that he would be glad of her help on some of the border-line cases which reach our lower courts in a status of suspended balance, and are either hauled back to safety or plunged into the chasm of the underworld, according as they are handled with or without tact and sympathy. After that visit, Darcy took to dropping in at the court twice a week or so to act as unofficial counselor where the judge mistrusted the mechanical rigidity of official intervention. It gave her a fresh zest in life to find herself of

some practical use to others. As to the extra work, she took that upon her supple shoulders without a quiver. Body and soul, Darcy had grown as fresh and vigorous as ripening fruit and as sturdy as the tree that bears it.

Satisfying as was the compliment paid her by the magistrate, she had a better one from Andy not long after. At the conclusion of one of their five-minute boxing bouts, in the course of which she had landed once with force and precision below the professional's properly cauliflowered ear, he said to her, with a somewhat hesitant air:

"Say, Miss Darcy; are yah rich?"

"I certainly am not."

"But — excuse *me* if I'm too nosey — yah got money, ain't yah?"

"Only what I earn."

"Earn? D' yah work?"

"Of course. I'm the original Honest Working Girl you read about, Andy."

"Pretty good job?"

"Fairly."

"Yah would n't wanta quit it, I guess," surmised the trainer.

"For what?" asked the wondering Darcy.

"Yah see," explained Andy, nonchalantly juggling a medicine-ball the while, "since the tight skirt come in I'm getting a lot of ladies to train down to their skirts. More 'n I can really handle right. Now, I kinda thought if you'd come in as assistant — well, yah can name yahr own terms, Miss Darcy."

The girl looked at him with bright and affectionate eyes. "Andy, you're a dear. That's the nicest thing that ever happened to me."

"It ain't a proposition I'd make to everybody, I can tell yah," averred the professional. "In fact, I dunno as there 's any one else I'd make it to but you. Except Miss Greene," he added loyally.

"I'm awfully sorry, Andy. But I could n't very well drop my other work."

"No?" sighed Andy. "Well, I s'pose not. Well," he added, palliating the blow to his hopes, "yah'll be gettin' married one of these days, and then it'd be all off, anyhow."

"Married!" laughed his pupil. "Who'd marry a plain little stick like me in a city full of pretty girls?"

"Go-wan!" retorted the other. Regarding her candid face, he perceived that this was no

bluff. "Go-wan!" he repeated fervidly. "Get onto yahrself. Ain't yah got a *mirrah* in the house?"

"Oh, that 's just because you like me, Andy," she returned.

Nevertheless she thrilled to the rough compliment. Holcomb Lee, with his artistic sense, and now this expert of flesh and blood! Was her dream really coming true already?

That very afternoon it was shattered.

The Fifth Avenue bus went sliding, slewing, and curving along the wet pavement. Within sat a moist and bedraggled but cheerful Darcy, returning from a highly encouraging consultation with Mr. B. Riegel and the head of his color-room called in to meet the firm's most promising contributor of designs. Another advance in her rates had been foreshadowed; so what did Darcy care, though forgotten umbrella and overshoes had exposed her to a violent shower, now clearing? Her Central Park jaunts had hardened her to a point where she disregarded weather with contemptuous indifference. So now, instead of being huddled in her seat, contemplative of her own discomfort, she sat alert and interestedly watchful of the outside world

that went sliding past her window. At the corner of Fifteenth Street the bus skidded to a stop at the signal of a frail, poorly dressed young woman who staggered out from the curb, lugging a large suitcase in both hands. She tried to lift it to the step and failed.

Now, it was nobody's business how the chance fare got on the bus, or, indeed, whether she got on at all or was left standing on the asphalt, except the conductor's and he was busy upstairs. Certainly it was no affair of Darcy's; and the old Darcy would have taken that view in the improbable event of her having noticed the overweighted woman at all. The new Darcy was up instinctively and out like a flash. She grabbed the case and got a surprise. It weighed at least sixty pounds. Darcy had the basis for a fairly accurate estimate, as she had been recently occupying herself with a sixty-pound dumb-bell. Thanks to a persuasive quality of muscle which this exercise had imparted to her, she whisked the ponderous thing to the platform, and bore it victoriously inside. The woman followed, panting out her gratitude. As Darcy was setting her burden down, the bus gave an unexpected lurch and one end of

the case landed upon a slightly projecting shoe. The owner of the shoe gave utterance to a startled and pained interjection.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" apologized Darcy, shifting the offending bag.

The injured one turned upon her a smile as unruffled and good-humored as if his main enjoyment in life was having heavy things dropped on his feet. But there was no recognition in the smile nor in the brief glance which accompanied it. Yet the smiler was Mr. Jacob Remsen.

"Entirely my fault," said he. "Teach me to keep my feet out of the aisle." Darcy murmured something muffled and incoherent.

"Let me stow that for you," offered Remsen, and, finding a spot for it beneath the steps, deposited it there, bowed in response to the thanks of the two women, and resumed his seat. The newcomer slipped in beside Darcy.

"You work, don't you?" asked she, timidly.

"Yes. What makes you think so?"

"Because you're so kind. And you're awful strong."

"That suitcase is much too heavy for you. You'll injure yourself with it," said Darcy, who was no larger than the other, severely.

"Metal advertising cuts," explained the other. "I only have to carry it twice a week."

"Where to?"

"Thirtieth over beyond Third Av'nyeh."

"But that's a terribly long way to carry that weight."

The woman sighed. "Yes, I know. It's nearer by the Fourth Av'nyeh line, but I go this way because the bus conductors are so decent about helpin' you on and off," said she, paying a merited compliment to the most courteous and serviceable of New York's transportation employees. "It's worth the extra nickel."

"I'll get off with you and give you a lift."

Different arrangements, however, were in process. Nearing the corner of the prospective debarkation Mr. Jacob Remsen arose, walked to the door, and vigorously yanked the corpulent valise from its nook.

"I beg your pardon," said he, dividing his impersonal and courteous regard between the two occupants of the seat, "but I overheard your conversation. It just happens that I'm bound for Third Avenue, myself. So, if you will permit me —"

Darcy's companion, abashed by the elegance

of this obvious "swell," wriggled and fluttered and protested. Mr. Remsen paid no heed.

"Here we are," he announced cheerily, stepping to the pavement. "Watch your step."

Thus overruled, the woman followed. The assumer of burdens not his own attained the sidewalk and all but dislocated his neck by the jerk with which he turned it, as a voice from the departing bus said clearly, and, as he thought, a shade maliciously:

"Thank you, Mr. Remsen."

The malice was there. It was a reflex of Miss Darcy Cole's resentment in that, apart from any question of recognition, Mr. Jacob Remsen had failed to see, in one casual glance at her face, anything which impelled him to bestow a second glance. Genuine though they had been, the testimonials of Messrs. Andy Dunne and Holcomb Lee were thereby attainted and brought to naught.

No one, to hear Miss Cole's lightsome subsequent report of the occurrence for the benefit of Gloria Greene, would have dreamed that it had left a sting.

"Now, what," concluded the narrator of the episode, "do you suppose the magnificent

Mr. Remsen was doing in a scrubby Third Avenue locality?"

"Precisely what you were going to do," opined Gloria. "Helping some one who needed his help."

"You mean that that combination of Adonis and Ananias had no real business of his own there at all?"

"I can't conceive what it would be."

Darcy opened wide and luminous eyes. "Then it was just to be a good fellow?"

"Probably. You would n't think it of Jack Remsen, would you?"

"I don't know that I would n't. Why not?"

"Oh, he gives the impression to those who don't know him of being so particular about himself and so indifferent about all the rest of the world that is n't a Remsen," said Gloria.

"D' you think so?" queried Darcy carelessly. "That was n't the impression he gave me when I first met him."

"What was your reading of his character, oh, wise and profound student of human nature?"

"If you laugh at me I won't tell you," retorted Darcy, and, as Gloria was openly laugh-

ing at her, proceeded to do it in the following inventory:

"I thought that if I was a very old, plain woman with a lot of bundles, or a sick cat, or a man in an awful mess, I'd look to him first in any crowd."

"Jack would like that," commented Gloria, with her sunlit smile.

"But not if I were a plain, little, unnoticeable girl."

Gloria twinkled. "An afterthought," she declared. "Meaning yourself?"

"Meaning myself."

"Liar."

"Well, are n't I that kind of a girl? And if I are n't, why did n't he recall me, or even look at me twice?"

"Perhaps he's engrossed in his own troubles."

"Did n't look as if he had a trouble in the world."

"No; Jack would n't if he were to be shot at sunrise."

"Is he?"

"Not that I know of. But he's going to be exiled or forced into hiding or something evasive and lonely. Some boresome family row that

threatens to burst into a lawsuit, and when it does, Jack has to take cover and keep it until it's over, so as not to be called as a witness. So you need n't feel insulted simply because he is brooding on his own affairs to the neglect—"

"I'm not feeling insulted," denied the girl vigorously. "It's nothing to me whether people remember me or not." Suddenly her face sparkled and her mobile lips quivered delicately with suppressed glee. "Oh, but I *have* been insulted. I've saved it up to tell you."

"Business of listening eagerly," said the actress. "Who did it?"

"A man."

"Naturally. Hence the dimple." She pointed an accusing finger at Darcy's cheek. "Where?"

"Mouseley's restaurant, on the Circle."

"Gracious, child! You *are* peeking around the corners of life. Don't you know the Mouse-Trap is n't respectable?"

"I do now. I did n't then. Tea was all I wanted. The tea was respectable enough. It was very good tea."

"Never mind the tea. Tell me the rest."

"He — the man — came over to my table. He was n't a bad-looking man at all; so fresh-

colored and pinky-brown, and dressed like the back page of a magazine. And he called me" — Darcy chuckled most reprehensibly at this point — "he called me Miss Glad-Eyes."

"Did you shoo him away?"

"I told him he'd made a mistake, and he said he'd like to make one like it every day in the week and pulled out a chair and sat down. It was awfully funny."

"It sounds so. What did you do then?"

"I don't know what I'd have done, but I didn't have to do anything. Another man came up —"

"Two!" murmured Gloria. "Shades of Circe! Well?"

"This one had a funny ear and short hair and he said, 'You don't know me, miss. But I seen you workin'-out at Andy's. My name's Gillig. You done a good turn for my kid sister once and I ain't forgot it.' So I said, 'How do you do, Mr. Gillig. I can't introduce you to this other gentleman because he helped himself to this chair without mentioning his name.' 'That kind does,' Mr. Gillig said. 'He'd better take a run.' My pinky-brown caller did n't seem to take to the suggestion. 'Maybe so; maybe not,'

he said. 'I belong to the Bouncers' Union, myself.' Then Mr. Gillig looked at him hard and said, 'I'm Spike Gillig, the welter-weight. I don't practice me art for me health' — Yes, he did, Gloria; he spoke of it as his art! — 'And I ain't strong for scrappin' out of business hours,' he said. 'But I ain't goin' to sit by and see any rough stuff pulled on this young lady.' 'Whaddye mean, rough stuff?' said the other man, quite dignified and injured. 'Lemme tell you, I'm as much a gent as you are. And I ain't duckin' any muss, professional or amachure. My weight is a hundred-and-eighty, stripped, beggin' Miss Peach's pardon, and if you wanta know who I am, I'm Scrap Gilfillan, shortstop of the Marvels, comin' champions of the world. But if you say this lady is a friend of yours —'

"For some reason, Gloria, that seemed to make Mr. Gillig awfully angry. He got purple clear to his ears, and growled, 'She ain't no friend of mine. See? This is a lady, this is.' 'I gotcha,' the shortstop man said. He turned to me. 'Am I in wrong, miss? Was you ever to this joint before?' 'Never,' I told him. 'Apologies all round,' he said, quite handsomely. 'And if no offense is taken where none's meant, would

the two of you kindly have one little one with me just to prove it?"

"Lovely!" cried the entranced Gloria. "What did you do? This is important. Oh, this is most awfully important!"

"Do?" rippled the girl. "I took sarsaparilla."

"Darcy Cole, formerly Amanda Darcy Cole," said Gloria solemnly. "Come to my arms. I hereby declare you a full Fellow of the Institute of Life, free of its brotherhood, equipped to come and go in all its ways unafraid and unembarrassed by any complication. Blessed are those who are not too meek, for they shall take their own share of the earth without waiting forever to inherit it. Go forth and take yours. You'll like it."

"I love it! And I'm not afraid of it any more."

"It'd better be afraid of you," commented Gloria, regarding the vivid, youth-flushed creature before her. "Wait till I get you dressed up to your looks! Are you ready to gird on your armor for the campaign?"

"I'm dying with impatience!"

"We'll have a taxi by the hour and go forth to wallow in clothing. Oh, my blessed young

protégée, but you're going to make some trouble for this neglectful old world of ours before you wither, or I miss my guess."

"I shan't," returned the girl demurely, but with dancing eyes, "unless it calls me 'Poor Darcy.'"

Chapter IX

WHILE life and the lust of lovely things remain to Darcy Cole, she will not forget the thrilling experience of that day and other shopping days to follow. When it was all over she possessed:

Item: A dark-blue serge business suit, cut with a severity of line which on a less graciously girlish figure would have been grim, with a small, trim, expensive hat and the smartest of tan shoes and tan gloves. Clad in that Darcy suggested a demure and business-like bluebird.

Item: A black-and-white small-checked suit with just a little more latitude of character to it, and, to go with this, black patent-leather shoes from the best shop in town, and a black sailor hat, with a flash of white feather in it. In that Darcy resembled a white-breasted chat, which is perhaps the very most correct and smartest bird that flies.

Item — several items, in fact: Wonderful but unobvious garments, conjured by the magic touch of Gloria from the purchase of a whole bolt of white, filmy crêpe de chine and several

bolts of baby-blue ribbon, together with well-chosen odds and ends of laces; no less wonderful, but much more visible négligées, with long, lustrous rhythmical lines, devised by the same Gloria from the bargain purchase of an odd lot of pink crêpe de chine; arrayed in which Darcy was able to give herself a very fair imitation of a complacent though pale flamingo.

Item: An evening gown of shimmering silver and blue, carried out, in the curve of the daintiest of silk stockings, to the tip of fairy-gift silver slippers; and over it a blue velvet wrap lined and trimmed with an old chinchilla coat, which Sensible Auntie had given her several years before; wherein Darcy felt like some winged and shining thing come down from a moonlit cloud.

That was the end of eight hundred of Aunt Sarah's, hard, round, beautiful dollars. But not of the wonderful trip to Clothes-Land. For, at the last, Gloria produced the most stunning of traveling coats, dark-blue cheviot, with a quaint little cape, the whole lined with silken gray—a gray with a touch of under-color to match the blue warmth behind the gray of Darcy's eyes.

"For your wedding present, my dear," explained Gloria mischievously.

And when the girl wept for sheer delight, her mentor abused her and called her "Amanda," and threatened her with dreadful reprisals unless she at once dried her eyes so that account could be duly taken of her. Of that stock-taking Gloria, re-creatrix, made no report to the subject. But this is what her gratified eyes saw.

A girl who held herself straight like an Indian and at ease like an animal. Where there had been sallow cheeks and an unwholesome flabbiness, the blood now shone in living pink through the lucent skin. The eyes were twice as large as when, the year before, Darcy had set out upon her determined beauty quest; but that was because the sagging lines beneath had disappeared and the eyes themselves, deep gray against clear white, were softly brilliant with health. Above the broad, smooth, candid forehead, the hair, so deep brown as to be almost black, played the happy truant in little waves and whorls as delicate and errant as blown smoke. The chin was set and firm — that was Andy Dunne's discipline of soul and body. Above it the mouth smiled as naturally and unconsciously as it had

formerly drooped, and two little dimples had come to live in the corners. Beyond and above the sheer formative change in the girl, she was so pulsating, so palpitant with life that, even as she stood quiescent before Gloria's appraising eyes, she seemed to sway to some impalpable rhythm of the blood.

Yet Gloria was not wholly content. Hers was a wisdom that went deep. The re-created Darcy was a notable triumph, to be sure; looking upon her handiwork, Gloria found it good, nor did she doubt that others would find it good. But what of Darcy's own bearing toward all these changes? Had she found herself? Until that question was settled in the affirmative, Gloria, re-creatrix, would not be satisfied.

"Just the same I'd like to see Jack Remsen or any other man look at her as she is now once without looking twice," Gloria challenged the masculine world on behalf of her candidate for troubles and honors in the Great Open Lists.

Not men alone, but women as well, became addicted to that second look when Darcy passed their way in her new feathers. To her housemates the change, now forced upon their reluctant acceptance, was a matter of bewilderment

if not of actual perturbation. Holcomb Lee, justified of his prophecies, exulted over the fact to such a point that Maud Raines felt it her womanly duty to fix a quarrel upon him. Undismayed, Holcomb took Darcy out to dinner. ("Never, never, never in the world would I have accepted, Gloria," that dangerous young person assured her mentor, "if Maud Raines had n't been so catty and sneery about Holcomb's drawing me.") And Miss Raines hastily drowned her trumped-up grievance in a flood of alarmed tears. Even matter-of-fact Paul Wood, Helen's betrothed, was impressed to the point of admiring comment.

"That chrysalis has hatched for fair," said he.

"Hatched!" retorted Helen. "It did n't hatch. It exploded!"

She and Maud wished to know, not without asperity, first why Darcy was getting her trousseau in advance of the season; next, why she was wearing it, item by item. Darcy was wearing the unaccustomed finery for a perfectly sound and feminine reason which she did not feel called upon to expound for the enlightenment of the two fiancées. She felt taller,

straighter, and more independent in it. Moreover, she found it a business asset. Palpably affected by the richness and variety of her wardrobe, B. Riegel had proffered a guarantee basis of work which assured her future income. Thus the clothes bade fair to pay for themselves. But on alternate afternoons, Darcy, faithful to her training, garbed herself in rusty sweater, short skirt, and shapeless shoes, and did her stunt through Central Park. Her term at Andy's academy having expired, she had taken on a new schedule of two hours per week: that being all, her preceptor assured her, that was needed for the preservation of her fitness "to jump in the ring and put 'em up with the Big Feller himself at the clang of the bell." A slight exaggeration, but to Darcy, a grateful one.

With ever-growing approval, Gloria saw the girl accomplish that distinctively feminine feat known as "settling into your clothes."

"My dear," she remarked one day when the two had come in from a walk, "if Monty Veyze could see us together now, I would n't have a chance with him."

Darcy grabbed and hugged her. "You're

talking nonsense, and you know it. No man in the world would look at me if you were in the same block."

"Would n't they!" retorted the actress ungrammatically. "I'd hate to put it to the test of a regular constituted jury."

"I'd have to bar Mr. Remsen from the jury box," smiled Darcy.

"Have you seen Jack again?"

"Ran into him, plop, on Fifth Avenue yesterday."

"Were you in your best bib-and-tucker?"

"The black-and-white check."

"Did he look through you?" asked the actress.

"N-not exactly."

"Did he look past you?" asked the actress,

"N-o-o-o."

"Well, did he look at you?" she persisted.

"Yes. But he did n't know me."

"I'm sure he did n't," chuckled Gloria. "Did n't you bow to him?" she added. "Next time you meet a nice young man like Jack Remsen, you march straight up to him and take him by the beard — "

"He has n't got a beard."

" — metaphorically speaking, and ask him if he is n't ashamed of himself for not remembering you. He will be. Oh, never fear he will be!"

Darcy pursed her red lips up to a funny little assumption of prudery. "He'd think me a forward young hussy."

"Let him. You've been backward long enough."

"I — I — I have n't really got used to — to the new feeling yet," said the girl shyly.

"To being pretty? Say it out. It's easy enough to get used to. Just feel as pretty as you look. Go on a perpetual parade until you learn the right kind of self-consciousness. Being a woman is an asset, not a liability in life. When you've absorbed that powerful truth, come to me and I'll impart some more wisdom." She fell into thought. "Darcy," she said portentously.

"Well?"

"I've got a grand and glorious idea for a grand and glorious feeling — like Mr. Briggs's."

"Don't keep me waiting. I can't stand suspense."

"I'm going to give a party for you, with the

brides for side dishes, but principally to celebrate your graduation."

"Oh, joy!" cried Darcy.

Joy proved to be a mild and inexpressive word for the party. So far as Miss Darcy Cole was concerned, it was a triumph. The two brides, each sufficiently attractive in her own type, simply paled away before their unconsidered flat-mate. Gloria did n't pale away. No rivalry could shadow her superb individuality. With her guest of honor she shared the laurels of a victorious evening. Stimulated to her best self by the realization of success, conscious of a buoyant body, perfectly clad, and a soaring spirit, Darcy unwittingly took and held the center of the stage, into which Gloria cunningly and unobtrusively maneuvered her. At the end of the long night of fun, Miss Cole sat enthroned. Miss Cole had sung like a lark. Miss Cole had danced like an elf. Miss Cole had laughed like a spirit of mirth. Miss Cole had fairly radiated a wholesome, keen, full-blooded, high-spirited gayety and happiness shot through with that indefinable glow of womanhood which is as mysterious and unmistakable as the firefly's light and perhaps as unconsciously purposeful.

One thing only detracted from Gloria Greene's satisfaction in the triumph of her protégée. Jacob Remsen had not been a witness to it.

Mr. Remsen was in retirement.

"I do want you and Jack to like each other," said Gloria to Darcy, in the inevitable talk-over which followed the grand triumphal party.

"Of course," returned the girl softly and warmly regarding her friend. "And of course I'm going to like him just as hard as ever I can, if he'll let me."

"For your sake" was the implication of that warmth, which would have considerably astonished Gloria had she appreciated it. But how should she know the interpretation given by the girl to that casual kiss overseen in the studio? Gloria's mind was running in quite a different direction.

Sequels to the party and to Darcy's success were promptly manifested in the form of sundry boxes and parcels bearing fashionable trade insignia which flowed in upon Bachelor-Girls' Hall. But not for Miss Raines or Miss Barrett. Out of her sumptuous surplus, Miss Cole was pleased to present a dozen American Beauty

roses to Miss Raines and a five-pound box of "special" candies to Miss Barrett, explaining kindly that she could not possibly use them herself. That was the glory-crowned summit of a delicate revenge, long overdue. "Poor Darcy," indeed!

So Darcy came into her own. One year Gloria had given her. The year had not yet gone. But most of Aunt Sarah's gift had. Who cared? Not Darcy. She had won her heritage of womanhood. Where, a few brief months before — and she could laugh now at the pangs and hardships of those months which were so small a price to pay for the results! — she had looked a worn thirty years old and felt like a sapless leaf, she now looked a budding twenty and felt like a baby with a drum.

Life was her drum.

All its stirring rataplan, however, could not quite drown out the grim voice of reckoning, which spoke with the accent of Sir Montrose Veyze, Bart., of Veyze Holdings, Hampshire, England.

Chapter X

FIVE times Mr. Thomas Harmon vainly rang the bell of the Remsen mansion. While engaged upon the sixth variation he became aware of a face in the window, scrutinizing him.

"All right," called the face.

Mr. Harmon was then admitted through a crack scarcely adequate to his well-set, muscular frame, to the presence of Mr. Jacob Remsen, who wore an expensive dressing-gown and an expression of unutterable boredom.

"Laid up?" inquired Mr. Harmon, shaking hands.

"Bottled up," answered the young man gloomily.

"Can I help?"

"Possibly. Did you ever kill a subpœna-server?"

"Not yet."

"Care to try?"

"What does the thing look like?"

"Cast your eyes toward the Avenue and you'll see one."

"Hm! Not much to look at, is he?"

"A worse-looking one comes on at ten and stays all night."

"I see," said the visitor. "It's a blockade."

"Hard and fast."

Among Mr. Harmon's many endearing virtues is this: he never asks questions about other people's troubles. He now busied himself in thought.

"Have n't you any of your amateur theatrical duds here?" was the outcome of his cogitations.

"All of 'em."

"Why not dress a part and walk away *incognito?*"

"Oh, certainly!" assented the other with bitterness. "Put on a suit of tights and dive out of the conservatory window disguised as Annette Kellerman, I suppose."

"What's the matter with an old man make-up and the front door?"

"Just this. Friend Murphy on watch hauls out his little paper and on the chance of its being me, slaps the wrist of anybody who appears on those steps. He'll do it to you when you go out."

"He did n't when I came in."

"No, he would n't, coming in."

"Then why not fool him by coming in?"

"How the devil can I come in without going out?" demanded Mr. Remsen crossly, for confinement was beginning to tell upon his equable disposition.

"Simplest thing in the world if you'll be guided by me."

"Spill it."

"Merely a matter of distracting Friend Murphy's attention for ten seconds. At the end of the ten seconds you will be seen going up the steps to the front door. Presently you will be seen coming down again, unable to effect an entrance against the watchfulness of the faithful Connor. Do you get me?"

"I get you. I'm to be in disguise. But how shall we get the process-server off guard?"

"Leave that to me."

The two conspirators elaborated their plan, built it up, revised it, tested it at every point, and pronounced it perfect.

"But we've forgotten one point," said Remsen at the end of the discussion.

"What's that?"

"Where do I go when I get out?"

"Where do you want to go?"

"Anywhere out of the world."

Mr. Thomas Harmon submerged himself in thought and came up bearing a pearl of great price.

"Keno! I've got it. Refuges furnished to order. You've never been to my place in the mountains, have you?"

"No."

"Boulder Brook on Lake Quam. Plumb in the dead center of nowhere. Thirteen miles from a railroad. Fishing and hunting on the premises."

"Reads like a real-estate man's prospectus," observed Remsen.

"This year," pursued Harmon, "I'm keeping open house for a special reason. Two fellows I know are getting married to-morrow. It's a double wedding. It's also a double honeymoon. But they are n't onto that yet." Harmon's clear brown eyes twinkled. "One half won't know how the other half lives till they get there. I've loaned the place to both couples for a fortnight. It 's a dead secret. Neither couple knows where the other is going. They're on oath."

"They won't thank you when they meet across the dinner-table."

"Oh, it is n't as bad as that. They'll be a mile apart. The Lees will be at the cottage. They get off at Meredith and go in on the truck. The Woods I'm sending to the Island. They climb out at Ashland and go over by boat. Unless they all happen to take the same train, one pair won't even know the other is around until they meet up on the lake or in the woods."

"Sounds like a party."

"Does n't it? Want to join?"

"What? Butt in on a double bridal tour? Excuse me with thanks."

"No butt in about it. You can go to Laconia, get yourself a car from the garage, and motor to the Bungalow. That's at the third corner of my little triangular piece of mountain and forest. By the practice of expert woodcraft and dodging you can avoid seeing the others."

"Would n't know them if I did. Any other agreeable surprises about the resort?"

"No. Oh, yes. I nearly forgot. There's a little friend of Gloria Greene's. Girl. Tired out. Too much gayety or something. Don't know what it

is or who she is, but she's up against it for a month's rest. So Miss Greene wished her on Boulder Brook, and welcome."

"Where does *she* go?" inquired Remsen suspiciously. "To the Cave? Or the Castle on the Crags? Or the Haunted Manor House? Or the Co-educational Club? Or which one of the numerous institutions you maintain in your private city?"

"She goes to the Farmhouse. Mrs. Bond, my housekeeper, is looking after her. Seclusion is her watchword. If you see her, make a noise like a dry leaf and blow away. You'll go, won't you?"

Remsen meditated. "It certainly seems made to order. And it's mighty good of you, old man. Yes, I'll just take you up on that."

"There's a train at nine o'clock in the morning. To-morrow?"

"Make it the day after. I've got some things to attend to."

"Now, about our jail-breaking scheme? I've got an amendment. How would it be if the taxi I arrive in should catch fire at the psychological moment?"

"Can it be done?"

"Easily. I'm not a manufacturer of chemicals for nothing."

"Great! Keep it going for ten seconds for the benefit of the watchful Murphy, and if you look up after that, you'll see the Englishest looking Englishman you ever sat eyes on outside the pages of *Punch*, trying to tear my old-fashioned doorbell out by the roots."

"That's your best make-up, is it, Remsen?"

"As good as any. Fortified by my accent, it is most convincing. That'll be Carteret."

"Who?"

"Rodney Carteret."

"Am I supposed to know him?"

"Rather. Not know a man with whom you toured for two months in Japan?" said Remsen reproachfully.

"Stupid of me," confessed Harmon, grinning. "Carteret. Good old Roddy! Certainly. Then I'd better capture you — him, I mean, and take him to the nine o'clock train for Boulder Brook, in my taxi."

"Right-o, old thing! Be here at eight-thirty. Cheery-o!" said his host Britishly.

Promptly at that hour, on the second morning thereafter, a taxicab swerved violently into

the curbstone almost at the feet of the patient and vigilant Murphy, and stopped with an alarming scrunch of brakes. From its window emerged a heavy puff of smoke. From its door emerged Mr. Thomas Harmon, who rolled upon the pavement apparently strangling. Mr. Murphy rushed to his aid. When he was restored to his feet and his breath, and the taxi had ceased to imitate Fafnir the Dragon, a tall figure in an extremely English ulster (which had hastily emerged from the Remsen front door, rushed down ten steps, and leisurely climbed them again) was wrenching violently at the bell. For a time Mr. Murphy regarded him disdainfully, then crossed over, held brief colloquy, and returned.

"Hot chance he's got of breaking in," he observed to Mr. Harmon.

"What is he making all the fuss about?" inquired that gentleman as the visitor again applied himself forcefully to the bell.

"Wants to see Mr. Remsen. But the old bulldog of a butler won't let him put his nose inside the door. Says his name is Carteret, and he's come all the way from England to see him."

"England? Not Roddy Carteret!" It was

done almost as well as that accomplished actor, Mr. Jacob Remsen, could have done it. Harmon sprang across the street.

"Carteret! Roddy Carteret!" he called. "What on earth are you doing over here?"

The bell-ringer adjusted a monocle and ambled down the steps to shake hands. "Well met, m'deah fellah! Perhaps you can tell me what's amiss with this beastly house."

"I'll tell you," proffered the obliging and innocent Mr. Murphy. He did so.

"Then I'll just go back and jolly well camp there till somebody jolly well lets me in," decided the caller.

Argument followed while the chauffeur burrowed into the mechanism of his car. It ended by the Englishman bestowing two dollars upon Mr. Murphy to get a message to Mr. Remsen containing a protest and an address. The two gentlemen then moved away in the extinguished taxi.

Tickets had been provided by the forethoughtful Harmon. The fugitive was the first man in the parlor car. Hardly had he settled when a young couple in suspiciously new apparel arrived, and were shown into Drawing-

Room "A," at the upper end of the car. Shortly after, another couple, also glistening as to garb, entered and took possession of Drawing-Room "B," at the lower end of the car. The eluder of justice eyed them and drew his own conclusions.

"Here we are, all of us," he said to himself, retiring discreetly behind his newspaper.

This was just one short of the full and fateful facts.

Chapter XI

GONE into the dim recesses of the past was the nuptial day of October 15. Gone also, into what dim recesses their erstwhile flat-mate knew not, were Mrs. Holcomb Lee, *née* Maud Raines, and Mrs. Paul Wood, *née* Helen Barrett. Presently Darcy would be gone also, for this was October 17, and, although the fact had been successfully concealed from the society editors of the metropolis, ever avid of news with a title in it, on October 16 she had been married to Sir Montrose Veyze, of Veyze Holdings, Hampshire, England, at the Church of the Imagination. Sir Montrose had sent a wireless (forged by Miss Gloria Greene) advising his fiancee that he would arrive on the 16th, and they would be married at once. All of which would have profoundly astonished and perhaps scandalized the authentic Sir Montrose Veyze, at that particular time huddled over an insufficient stove and fervently cursing a Siberian northeaster with three feet of snow in its clouds.

No little strategy had been required to keep up the deception until after the real brides were

wedded, and, as the conspirators supposed, safely out of the way. Gloria supplied the required strategy, but it exhausted her store. What was going to be the outcome she knew no more than Darcy did. One fact only was clear: Darcy must disappear for a while. Accordingly the self-appointed manageress of the affair had borrowed Tom Harmon's hospitality for her protégée. Unfortunately, or fortunately according to the point of view, Mr. Harmon had refrained from mentioning to Gloria the other prospective visits.

Behold, then, on the fateful 17th of October, Miss Darcy Cole, a one-day bride of fancy, swinging down the long platform of the Grand Central Terminal with fifteen minutes to spare for the nine o'clock train. In her hand was a ticket to Weirs, and a small green slip entitling her to seat No. 12 in the parlor car "Chorea." In her eyes was a twinkling and perilous light, and in her heart a song of sheer, happy bravado. For Darcy was feeling in reckless spirits. It was her first vacation for more than a year. She was tingling with health and vitality. She rejoiced in that satisfaction, more precious to woman than rubies or diamonds or a conscience clear

of reproach, the pervading sense of being perfectly dressed. As for the wraith of Sir Montrose Veyze, Bart., of Veyze Holdings, Hampshire, England, and all the consequences depending therefrom, she was much in the mood to twiddle her thumbs at the whole affair and defy fate to do its worst.

She entered the car and saw him.

If ever a willful, skillful, careful, circumstantial lie came to life and embodiment for the purpose of confronting its perpetrator, hers stood before her with a monocle in its eye. In every detail it was as she had conceived Sir Montrose Veyze: tall, slender, clad in impeccable tweeds, with an intelligent, thin face inappropriately half-framed in side whiskers, and an expression of dissociation with the outside world; not so much conscious aloofness as a sort of habitual mental absenteeism. The apparition was, at the moment, trying to dispose an extremely British ulster in a rather insufficient rack.

Darcy stared at it, mute with amazement. It moved a little to let her pass and what the girl saw beyond it froze her blood. In Drawing-Room A sat Paul Wood and his bride!

Flight, instant and precipitate, was Darcy's

one idea; flight forth from that unchancy car. She whirled around, started for the lower exit, took three steps and halted with a choked cry.

In Drawing-Room B sat Maud Raines, that was, with her bridegroom.

Fate, defied, had promptly accepted the challenge. Darcy was trapped.

Kentucky cherishes a legend concerning the potency of its moonshine whiskey which is said to be such that one drink of it will inspire a rabbit to spit in the eye of a bulldog. Desperation will produce much the same psychological effect in the soul of woman. There, in monocle and whiskers, was Darcy's bulldog. And before her and behind her threatened Desperation, double-barreled. Darcy took a short, gaspy breath — it was all she could get — and advanced upon her unwitting victim.

The apparition had just succeeded in its aerial enterprise with the ulster when it became aware of a mute appeal at its elbow. It turned. It saw a girlish face, suffused with a wonderful warmth of color, clear, steady eyes, with an irresistible plea in them; lips that looked both firm and soft and were tremulous at the corners with what might be fear, but seemed much like

mirth, and two perfectly gloved little hands stretched out in welcome. No possible doubt about it; those hands were held out to the apparition.

The apparition's face underwent a sort of junior earthquake. Its monocle fell out. It replaced the doubtful aid to vision. It contemplated the creature of bewildering charm and still more bewildering behavior confronting it. Hesitatingly its hands went forth to meet those little, appealing, waiting hands.

"Monty!" said the girl in a clear, ringing, happy voice, and inexpertly kissed the apparition on the nose.

"Holy Snakes!" gasped the apparition.

It took a step backward. Its knees caught. It collapsed in its chair.

Chapter XII

AFTER that one exclamatory lapse from Briticism, the tweed-clad man sat speechless, struggling to regain command over his shattered sensibilities. In this laudable endeavor he was severely handicapped by his *vis-à-vis*. She had turned the chair next his and was now seated facing him with parted lips, fluttering color, and lovely, desperate, suppliant eyes, a picture to divert the most determined attempt at concentration.

"Please! Please," she implored, like a child, holding out her small, quivering hands to him. "Won't you speak to me?"

"Why — er — to be sure! To be sure! What shall I say, for choice?"

"Anything. Weather. Politics. 'Shakespeare and the musical glasses.' Only, talk!"

"But I'm afraid — er — there's some beastly mistake, you know."

"Pretend it is n't," she urged. "Oh, help me pretend it is n't."

There was the sound of a clicking latch back of her, and the tension of the girl's face relaxed

a little. A second click in front indicated a similar closure of Drawing-Room B.

Darcy took a long breath. No longer under observation, she enjoyed a truce in which to lay her plans. Incidentally she did her newly wed friends the gross injustice of rejoicing that Pullman doors have no keyholes.

"Now I can explain," said she composedly.

"Pray do." There was lively interest in his tone.

"No, I don't know that I can, either. I'm afraid you won't understand."

"Give me a sporting chance at it."

How very English he was! Had he been American, she might have appealed to his sense of the jocular and absurd. No hope with this ultra-British solemnity.

"Well," she began desperately, "there are some people in this car that I don't want to see."

"In the — er — compartment?"

"In both compartments. And they must n't see me."

"Quite so."

"But they've already seen me."

"Awkward, that," he murmured.

"Not so awkward as if they'd seen me alone. They've seen us. Together."

"But — er — it's no end nice of you, you know, and — and all that sort of thing. But why together?"

"That's what I'm trying to explain." She looked at him doubtfully. "I'm finding it rather hard."

"Perhaps you're not supposed to be traveling alone," he suggested.

"Now, that's quite clever of you!" Darcy beamed gratitude upon him. "I'm not. But I started alone and — and —"

"You were to meet a — a companion who failed you?" He was really striving to be helpful, but Darcy felt herself getting in deeper and deeper.

"No: that is n't it, at all."

"Then — er — I may be beastly stupid, but — er — really —" Blank bewilderment was expressed in every feature of his face including the monocle.

"Not at all," returned the girl politely. "No wonder you find it puzzling. It's quite involved." Then she took the plunge. "I'm eloping."

"Eloping?" Her *vis-à-vis* dropped his monocle, replaced it, and stared at Darcy. "Eloping! Impossible!"

"Why impossible? Don't you elope in England?"

"Er — personally, seldom. And never alone."

Was there a twinkle behind the monocle? Were the jokesmiths wrong about the English lack of humor? Or had she, happily, encountered a phenomenon? Darcy embraced the hope and changed her strategy in the midst of the assault.

"Here's your chance," she said with calm effrontery. "You see, my — the other person in my elopement failed to live up to his opportunity."

Her companion was understood to reflect adversely upon the sanity of the recreant.

"So," pursued the girl, her color flushing and paling, but her eyes unflinchingly steady, "if you would — oh, please don't think me dreadful! — if you could just pretend to be the man! It's only for a little while," she pleaded. "Just until we can get away from those people. Will you?"

"I will," he said solemnly.

"I wish you would n't say that as if — as if we were in church," protested the startled Darcy, plaintively.

"Ah, yes; by the way, have we been?"

"Have we been what?"

"To church."

"This is n't Sunday."

"No; but you say that we are eloping."

"Just for the present."

"Quite so. But is this—er—before or after?"

"Before or — Oh!!" Comprehension flooded the girl's mind and colored her cheeks simultaneously. "After," she said, in a small, gaspy voice. "We — we're married."

"Buck up!" exhorted her companion. "Don't take it so hard. It will soon be over. I merely wished to know, in case any question arose. When?"

"Ye — ye — yesterday. I mean, this morning."

"Best stick to yesterday," he advised kindly. "Before 9 A.M. is too early for probability."

He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes.

"You're not growing faint under the strain, I hope?" inquired Darcy, recovering her spirits.

"It is n't that," he replied dreamily. "I am only thinking that things like this do *not* happen to people. I shall count three, and if you're still there I shall know — well, I shall know that my mind is failing — and be glad of it."

Darcy began rather to like her accomplice. He was really quite nice — though old. "Count ten," she advised. "It's a better test."

He began to count slowly, and an elderly lady who came down the aisle to take the chair opposite hastily sought the porter with a view to having her seat changed. When he had declaimed "Ten" and opened his eyes, the quite startling exclamation which followed convinced the old lady that her caution was well judged. The enumerator had found himself facing emptiness.

"Turn around," directed a soft voice behind him.

He pivoted. "Oh!" he exclaimed in the most flattering tones of relief.

"The door of Drawing-Room B was getting nervous," she said. "So I changed. I don't want them to catch my eye. They might come out to speak to us."

"Come one, come all," declaimed the other;

"this chair shall fly from its firm base as soon as I."

"Fine poetry," granted the girl. "But this is prose."

"Nothing of the sort, if you'll pardon me. Impossible and glorious romance. Words by Lewis Carroll. Music by Lohengrin. Mr. Britling is for seeing it through."

"Mr. Britling — if you're sure that Mr. H. G. Wells would be willing to lend you the name —"

"I'll chance it."

"Then Mr. Britling does n't know his part yet and might get poor me into awful difficulties. No, we must get out of this car."

"Stamford the next stop," said the porter, who had overheard in passing.

"Can you put us into another car?" Darcy asked him.

"Farther away from the restaurant car," added her companion, and she thanked him with a glance for his shrewdness. If they were between the "Chorea" and the diner, her friends would pass them at luncheon-time.

"Dey's a obsehvation cah, reah cah," suggested the porter. "No extra chahge."

Darcy immediately rewarded him with a dollar. "If any one inquires about us," she said, "tell them that we got off at New Haven."

"Yassum. What name please, maddum?"

"No name. The lady and gentleman in 14 and 16."

Fortune had left vacant for their coming a semi-retired alcove in the observation car. Therein ensconced, they took breath and thought and stock of each other.

"Now, if you don't mind," said the man. "Who am I?"

"Your name is Veyze," answered the girl, dimpling. "You're English. You're awfully English! You're as English as — as yourself."

"Happy coincidence! May n't I have more than one name?"

"A full allowance. Sir Montrose Veyze, of Veyze Holdings, Hampshire."

"I say! Then I've come into the title."

"Quite a while ago. What you were before your succession, you know better than I."

He caught the point. "Rodney Carteret, at your service," he replied. "Here on a short stay. Diplomatic affairs."

"Well, Mr. Carteret, I'll remember you forever, for helping me out of an awful scrape. It must seem dreadfully flitter-headed and bad taste and ill-bred —"

"I can imagine you being flitter-headed — odd words you Americans use — but I really can't conceive of you doing anything ill-bred or in bad taste," said he with such sincerity that the girl flushed again.

"That's nice of you," she responded gratefully, "considering what I've done to you." Thereupon she proceeded to repay his courtesy by a tissue of fabrications which did credit to her long practice in mendacity.

"You would n't understand our American humor," she wound up; "but I put up a joke on my friends in the other car by pretending I was to be married yesterday. I won't bore you with the circumstances. I was going away for a trip all by my little self and they were to think it was my wedding trip. Who would have thought there could be such awful luck as to find them on my train? And me without a ghost of a husband to show on my honeymoon — until I grabbed you!"

"Then you're not actually married or be-

trothed or anything of the sort?" he inquired with lively hopefulness.

"Oh, but I am engaged," she answered, reverting to her original fiction. "My fiancé is on duty and can't get away. As soon as he comes over we're to be married. Now, please, do you think it's *very* awful? You've been so good, I should hate to have you despise me."

"Oh, I'm no sort of a despiser," he assured her. "And if I felt like doing a bit of despising, I'd go out in the woods and despise a toad. Certainly I should n't try my hand on anything as plucky and resourceful as you."

"Resourcefulness is good as far as it goes," said she. "But could I carry the thing through if my friends come back here and I have to present you?"

"I should n't concern myself about that," he comforted her. "Surely they won't come."

"Why not?"

"Bridal touring couples don't commonly go about seeking other companionship, do they?"

Darcy stared. "How do you know they are on their bridal trip? I never told you."

"Surmised it from something my friend, Mr. Thomas Harmon told me."

"Do *you* know Mr. Harmon?"

"Rah-ther! I'm on my way to his place."

"What place?" gasped Darcy.

"Boulder Brook, he calls it. It's up on the edge of the mountains."

The girl leaned back, closed her eyes, and began to count slowly: "One — two — three — four —"

"I say," broke in the partner of her plot. "Let a chap in on this. What's wrong?"

"You said it just now: 'These things do *not* happen to people.' You were right. They don't. Anyhow, they ought not to be allowed to. Five — six — seven — Oh, there's no use counting ten on this." She opened her great, gray-blue eyes wide upon him. "So'm I," she announced.

"So'm you *what?*"

"Going to Boulder Brook."

Barely in time did he check the natural rejoinder, "So are your friends, the bridal couples," for he bethought himself that, if she knew, she would doubtless escape from the train at the first station and this astounding and priceless adventure would be abruptly terminated. Instead he said:

"May I take you over with me? I'm having a car at Laconia."

"Mr. Harmon is having me met at Weirs. Weirs is miles nearer."

"Then perhaps you would n't mind giving me a lift with you. I'm for the Bungalow, wherever that is."

"And I'm for the Farmhouse, and the chaperonage of Mrs. Bond. So it is n't as terribly compromising as it sounds, is it? Though what in the world Mr. Harmon would think, if this ever got to his ears —"

"It won't. In any case, Harmon is not a thinker of evil."

Nevertheless the girl saw trouble in his eyes. Partly it was her innocence, partly the bravado to which the emergency of the day had strung her, which kept that same trouble out of her own eyes. With him it attained speech.

"How old are you?"

Across his shoulder Darcy's eye caught a number on the paneled side of the car. "Twenty-six," she lied promptly.

He was taken aback. "Really!" he murmured. "I should have said — aw — much younger. Are you sure you appreciate the pos-

sible — well — er — misconstructions to which this visit might give rise?"

"I don't see why it should," returned Darcy stoutly. "Anyway, I've no other place to go."

"But I could put off my trip."

"That would be a nuisance to you, would n't it?"

"To be quite frank, it would be rather more than that. I should risk getting caught."

"Caught?" echoed Darcy interestedly. "It sounds thrilling. Are you a fugitive from justice?"

"No. I'm a fugitive from injustice. See here, Miss Romancia, I'm something of a faker myself. Being up against it *good*, I'm going to 'fess up."

"'Faker'? 'Up against it'? Why — why, where 's your English accent gone?"

"Cut out. Pretty soon I'm going to do the same with these whiskers. They tickle."

So many surprises had been forced upon Darcy that, inured to them, she was able to sustain this one unperturbed. "It's a wonderful disguise," she approved. "And you play the part beautifully. But, if the question is n't indiscreet, why?"

"As I indicated, I'm flying for my life."

"Then I hope it's something thrilling like murder or arson, and not something petty like bigamy or fancy finance."

"Nothing as interesting as crime. I'm wanted as a witness in a will case. They're trying to catch me and put me on the stand and make me testify that my great-uncle was a crafty and vicious old lunatic."

"When he was n't? How horrid!"

"When he was. That 's horrider. And that others of my relatives were *roués* and scandalmongers and drunkards."

"I seem to have eloped into a nice cheerful sort of family," observed the girl.

"It'll be a lot less cheerful if they ever get me on the stand. My lawyer was to have warned me in time to get away, but the other side stole a march on him, and I barely managed to sneak out in this disguise. So I was going to lie low at Harmon's place until they gave up the chase. But as matters are, I can stick to my whiskers and my accent a while longer. And, really, much as I should like to continue this prose poem of ours, I think that for the sake of — well, of appearances, I'd better go on some-

where else. Unless you're quite sure that Mrs. Bond is there and —"

"She is," broke in Darcy. "I've had a telegram."

"In that case —"

"In that case, you come along in the car with me. I won't have your trip spoiled. Besides, don't you think I have some curiosity in my make-up? I've got to see you without yours, or perish!"

There was no irruption of the newly-weds to complicate matters. The pseudo-weds had sandwiches and ginger ale in the observation car and sat there getting better acquainted and more content with each other until the "Chorea's" porter sought them out.

"Drawin'-rooms is bofe gone," he said. "A got off at Ashlan' an' B lef' at Meredith. S'picioned you-all might lak to know."

His suspicion brought its reward. Ten minutes before the arrival at Weirs, Darcy's confederate excused himself.

"You get out by yourself," he said. "I'll join you on the platform."

Not yet comprehending, she followed instructions. Shortly after, there descended in front of

the jaw-loose and petrified porter the ultra-British ulster, and the forceful tweed suit, enclosing not a bewhiskered, monocled, and blond Englishman, but a smooth-faced, pleasant-visaged young man who looked out upon the world from his own unaided, keen, and twinking eyes.

As the train pulled out with the porter still bulging, incredulous, from the door, the changeling turned to join his self-appointed bride.

"How do you do, Mr. Remsen?" said she.

For the second time that day sheer amazement loosed the hinges of Mr. Jacob Remsen's knees, and the wellsprings of Mr. Jacob Remsen's sincere American speech.

"Well, I *am* jiggered!" gasped Mr. Jacob Remsen, tottering back against a truck.

Chapter XIII

MR. JACOB REMSEN, late Rodney Carteret, Esq., of Somewhere-in-England, was roused from his semi-paralysis by a broad and bearded native who approached, and, with a friendly grin, inclusive of both parties to the *vis-à-vis*, inquired:

"Either of yeh Miss Cole for Boulder Brook?"

"Both," said Darcy.

"Haw!" barked the native.

"That is, we are both going to Mr. Harmon's."

"Free bus to Boulder Brook," proclaimed the humorous native. "It's jest as well there 's two of ye, though Mr. Tom did n't say nothin' about more 'n one. Ye won't rattle s' much when we hit the rocks."

"I joined the party at the last moment," explained the impromptu bridegroom. "I'm for the Bungalow."

"Ye'll be there before ye know it. Twenty-one mile in twenty-eight minutes, comin' over in the ole boat."

Their cicerone led the way to "the ole boat,"

a large, battered, comfortably purring car, tucked them in with many robes, and applied himself to the wheel with an absorption which left them free to resume their own concerns. The surrounding mountains were in full panoply of their blazing October foliage, a scene to enthrall the dullest vision. Notwithstanding, Mr. Remsen's eyes kept straying from those splendors to the face of his companion. Attractive though this nearer view was, his own face wore the expression of one who painfully seeks the answer to an insoluble riddle. The girl answered his look with challenging mockery.

"Don't overheat your poor brain about it," she implored.

"He called you Miss Cole," said Remsen, with furrowed brows.

"Why not, since it's my name?"

"Cole? Cole!" ruminated her companion. "No. Positively no!"

"Positively, yes! Do you think it's quite gallant in you to forget me entirely."

"First you say I'm your husband," complained Remsen, "and now you claim acquaintance with me. It isn't fair. It muddles one's brain."

"Look at me hard."

"I've been doing that all day."

"But it does n't seem to have any result. Have n't you ever seen me before?"

"Certainly."

Darcy almost jumped. "Which time? I mean, where?"

"On the northeast corner of Fifth Avenue and Fiftieth Street, at 2.30 P.M. September 11th," returned the other, as one who recites a well-conned lesson. "You were looking up at an aeroplane and ran into me. You wore a black-and-white checked suit and a most awfully smart little hat, and I stood there gawking after you until I was in danger of being arrested for obstructing the traffic."

"Why?"

"Frankly, because I had n't seen anything quite like you since I landed, and I wanted to make the most of a poor opportunity."

"Then why did n't you lift your hat politely and say, 'How do you do, Miss Cole?' Like that."

"Because, by Heavens!" cried the badgered Remsen, "I don't know any Miss Cole."

"Think again," adjured Darcy. "There was

a blowy, windy day on a Fifth Avenue coach when you got off to help a woman with a suitcase —"

"Full of burglar's tools or solid gold ingots, I don't know which. Never thought a suitcase could weigh so much!"

"Poor Mr. Remsen!" laughed the girl, but her eyes were soft as she turned them to him. "You must have been terribly bored. But you were game. You did n't see me on the coach?"

"I did n't notice any one but the two working-girls with the suitcase. Do you think I could have seen you and forgotten you?"

"Be careful! You're only making it worse. One of the two working-girls called after you to thank you, did n't she?"

Remsen fell suddenly thoughtful. "Now I recall, the voice did seem familiar. But — surely —"

"Perhaps this will help." She hummed softly a passage of the lulling, lilting song which she had heard from his lips on that memorable day of her great resolve.

"Wait!" he cried. "I'm getting it! Gloria Greene's studio. A girl asleep on the divan, while I was playing. She corrected a change of

chord for me. But — you! Never tell me that was you!"

"Darcy Cole, at your service."

"Well — well, but," stammered Remsen, for once in his life wholly confused and bewildered. "What were *you* in disguise for?"

"I was n't."

"Then I must have been stone blind that day!"

"You had no eyes at all — for me," said she demurely. "However, that 's not to be wondered at."

"If it were, somebody else would have to do the wondering. My capacity in that direction is totally exhausted. Won't you please explain?"

"With pleasure. If you'll tell me what." Miss Cole was enjoying herself greatly.

"What this transformation scene means? At the studio you were, well —"

"Say it," she encouraged. "I was an ugly little toad."

Remsen made gestures and gurgles of violent protest. "Not at all! But you were — well, quite different."

"Yes, I was n't very well. Nor very happy."

"Judging from appearances, you must be about the healthiest and happiest person in the world to-day, then," he retorted.

"Do you know," she reproved, "that your compliments lack subtlety?"

"That 's easy. Because I mean 'em."

The native at the wheel made a quarter turn with his head, extended his mouth to a point east by north of his right ear, and from the corner of it shouted: "Set tight. Here 's where she gits kinder streaky."

Thereupon, as at a signal call, the car gathered itself together and proceeded to emulate the chamois of the Alps. For several frantic leaps and jounces the couple in the back seat preserved the conventionalities. Then came a stretch where an ancient, humpbacked vein of granite had thrust itself up through the road's surface, and all decorum was flung to the winds. Miss Cole crossed the car in two bunny-jumps and fell upon Mr. Remsen's neck, thrusting his head against the side curtain with such force as to form a bulge, which several outreaching trees playfully poked with their branches. As further evidence of her affection, she stuck her elbow in his eye, after which she coyly retreated into her

own corner by the aerial route. Mr. Remsen assisted her flight by a method known in football as "giving the shoulder." He then rose to explain, settled squarely upon both her feet, and concluded the performance by seating himself on her knees and browsing a mouthful from the veil which was twisted about her hat. Taking advantage of a precious but fleeting moment when the car soared like a gull across a bay of mud, they both addressed the chauffeur.

"Stop!" shrieked Miss Cole.

"Schlupff!" vociferated Mr. Remsen, meaning the same thing. But the veil had become involved with his utterance.

The native brought his "boat" to a halt, just short of a ghastly blind turn, screened by a wooded cliff.

"S' matter?" he inquired.

"You're shaking us to bits," protested Darcy. "Please don't go so fast."

"Shucks!" said the other. "Call *that* fast? I could do better with a hearse."

"Very likely," returned Remsen. "The passenger in a hearse has n't anything to say about how he travels. We have. Ease it up."

What retort the native might have found was

cut off by a persistent trumpeting from around the curve.

"Honk-honk! Prr-rr-rrump! Honk! Honk-honk-*honk!* Prr-rr-rrump, prr-rr-rramp!"

"Two cars," interpreted the native. "Bellerin' fer help, I would n't wonder. Prob'ly bogged down in that mud-waller at the foot of the hill. One of 'em sounds like our truck."

Again the brazen voice of warning and appeal thrilled through the air.

"'*T is* our truck," confirmed the chauffeur. "I know the old caow's voice. I pree-soom that couple for the boss's cottage is gettin' a taste of real country life in the roadin' line."

"What couple?" asked Darcy, sitting up.

"Young married pair. Got off the train at Meredith."

"At Meredith?" repeated Darcy, in troubled tones.

"There 's another couple due from Ashland for the Island. All friends of the boss's. Like 's not that 's the other car that 's whoopin' it up daown there 't the foot o' the hill. Quite a pa'ty."

The gleam of a horrid surmise shone in the look which Darcy turned upon Remsen.

"Do you suppose it *could* be they? Oh, it *could n't!*"

"I'm very much afraid it is."

"Oh, that would be too awful! *Don't* let it be Maud and Helen!"

"If I could help it, I would," he replied, bracing himself for confession. "I'm sure it is your friends. In fact, Tom Harmon told me they were coming."

"You knew it all the time?"

"I did."

"And let me come here without a word of warning?" The girl's tone rasped Remsen's accusing conscience. She spoke like a hurt child whose trust has been betrayed.

Remsen waited until the chauffeur, who had jumped out and was on his way to the scene of distress, was beyond hearing. Then he said:

"Please don't think me wholly selfish. But how was I to know that the presence of other couples — I mean other people — would be so distressing to you?"

"Don't pretend to be stupid," she rebuked him. "There I was, a bride without any bridegroom, looking for a place to hide myself and you let me run right into the very people of all

in the world that I did n't want to see. You knew I did n't want to see them. I told you so," she ended with a suggestion of fearfulness, "the first thing. On the train."

"Before you had a husband," he reminded her. "Now you have one —"

"And that makes it worse! A thousand times worse. Oh, why did n't you tell me on the train?"

"Suppose I had. What would you have done?"

"Got off at the next station. Jumped out of the window. Anything!"

"And have been alone in some strange place with nobody to look after you? If you 'd done that, I should have felt obligated to get off, too."

"You would n't!" Darcy stamped her foot. "You have n't any right."

"When a lady puts a claim on a gentleman as her husband," remonstrated Remsen mildly, "while he may not have the right to prevent her from jumping out of the window of a moving train, at least he may use all fair means to see her through."

"Do you think you 've been fair in this?"

"*Kamerad!* I surrender! I don't! The plain fact is, I knew you 'd run away if I told you, and I could n't bear to lose you, after I'd miraculously found you again."

"Consequently," she accused, "I am here where the girls are sure to find me, married and without a husband, or with a husband that they'll discover is bogus. What am I going to do?"

"List to an inspired idea! I've just thought it out. When you see your friends, tell them that I did n't get off the train at all. I went right on to Montreal."

"And deserted your bride?"

"Emergency call on imperative official business. Back to-morrow or next day, or whenever you choose to tell 'em. That'll give you time to arrange things and fix up a good, water-tight lie."

"No lie could be good enough."

"Wait till we put our heads together over it."

"How can we put our heads together if your head is in Montreal?"

"It won't be, except for publication to the bridal party. It'll be at the Bungalow. I'm going to carry it there now, on foot."

"And stay there until it's time for you to get back from Montreal?"

"Precisely. When you need your titled Britisher back, I'll be ready, with the accent and the infernal, scratchy whiskers."

"Suppose, meantime, the bridal couples come wandering about the Bungalow?"

"Then I'll take to the woods. Lives of the hunted and all that sort of thing. Before I'm through with all this I may have to disguise myself as a rabbit and learn to twitch my ears."

"It's fearfully risky —" began the girl.

"It is," he confirmed, "with the woods full of amateur hunters. But I've known rabbits to live to a ripe old age. There was an old cottontail on Uncle Simeon's place —"

"Please don't joke. It's fearfully serious for me. I've got to go ahead and face the girls."

"Say the word and I'll gird my gospel armour on — I mean my side-burns — and support you."

"Yes: and what would our frisky chauffeur think of that! Gracious goodness! I forgot about him. What will he think about your disappearance if you run away now?"

"Leave him to me. I've got an argument for him."

The native reappeared with the information that the truck was bemired and that the garage car in which one couple had arrived from Ashland (the motor-boat having broken down) was unable to pull it out unaided. Therefore, he told them, he would have to go to the rescue with his car.

Mr. Remsen produced a roll of greenbacks. "Have you any aversion to a ten-dollar bill?" he inquired.

"I ain't never knowed one teh make me sick t' my stommick yet," confessed the native.

"Try this one," said Remsen.

But the speeder withheld his hand. "What am I bein' hired fer?"

"To tell me a short cut by foot to the Bungalow."

"Over this hill, and yeh can see it. Only house in sight. Whut else?"

"To ferget that you've seen me."

"Nuthin' fishy about this?" inquired the cautious chauffeur.

"It 's just a little joke on the people in front."

"My mem'ry," said the other, pocketing the

bill, "ain't whut it was. I c'n jest ba'ly rec'lect t' say 'Thank-ye,' but there my power gives out. Some one comin' around the bend," he added.

Remsen made a dive into the underbrush. From somewhere above Darcy, a moment later, a tree found voice to speak like a dryad:

"I'll be at your call to-morrow."

At the elbow of the road appeared Maud and Holcomb Lee. Darcy, envying Daniel what has been regarded as one of the most trying experiences in the records of animal training, walked forward to meet them.

Her head was high.

Her chin was firm.

Her step was light.

Her eyes danced with defiance.

Andy Dunne would have been proud of her.

She was game.

Chapter XIV

ROUSED into semi-wakefulness by the first shaft of sunlight that pierced the Bungalow windows, Mr. Jacob Remsen indulged in sleepy self-communion.

"Who are we this morning? Not our bright and lovely self. That 's a cinch . . . Rodney Carteret? No: we shook Rodney in New York . . . Veyze! That 's it; Montrose Veyze. *Sir* Montrose, if you please. . . . Oh, Lord! The bride."

Unaccustomed though he was to allow the sun's early rays to pry him forth from his slumbers, the man of aliases leapt out of bed, chuckled himself through his toilet and breakfast, and still emitting sub-sounds, not so much of glee as of a profound and abiding satisfaction in life, took the road for Center Harbor. Darcy, still wrapped in dreams at the Farmhouse, would have made the distance in better time; nevertheless, his hour-and-a-half was a fairly creditable performance. In consequence of certain telephonic efforts of the previous evening, he expected to find an express package at his destination, wherein he was not disappointed.

At eleven o'clock, Darcy rambled down the long, wooded driveway, leading from the Farmhouse to the lake. Off to her right, where a little brook brawled gayly down among rounded boulders, another dryad-haunted tree burst into soft, familiar music. She answered the whistled melody with a pipe of her own, as true and sweet.

"Coast clear?" asked the tree, which, for a good American hickory, spoke with a surprisingly British accent.

"Yes. Come out."

"Just a minute. What 's my nationality?"

"English, this morning."

"I thought likely. So I put on the regalia." The owner of the voice stepped forth in the full panoply of wig, whiskers, and monocle.

Darcy surveyed him disparagingly. "No," she decided. "I don't like it as well as I did."

"Perhaps you prefer the original," he suggested modestly. "I do, myself. But I was afraid some one might be around."

"Nobody is likely to be here this morning. And the rig does n't fit in with that great box you 're carrying. What 's in it? More disguises?"

He uncovered the box and held it out to her.

"Grown on the premises," he lied gayly. "Picked with the dew still on 'em."

The girl gathered the blooms into her arms and drew them up to her face with a sudden, tender, mothering gesture which caused the giver's heart an unaccustomed and disturbing thrill. He was well repaid for the trip to Center Harbor.

"How lovely!" she cried. "And how good of you! What kind are they? For reward you may take off your disguise, but you must hide if the others come."

"I will," he agreed, and answered her question: "They're bride and bridesmaid roses. Appropriate to the occasion."

Darcy had the grace to blush. "Out of date," she said hastily.

"What! Already?"

"I've changed my mind," was her calm announcement. "I've decided that you're not my husband."

"Wedded and Parted — by Bertha M. Clay. Who's the Bertha M. that's done this thing to me?"

"I am. As soon as you left I saw that it would n't fit in at all for us to be married. The

servants here probably visit between house and house. And it was bound to come out that I was at the Farmhouse and you at the Bungalow, and — well — don't you see that would look funny if we were married?"

What Jack Remsen saw was that the girl was like the pinkest of the bridesmaid roses when she blushed, though a sweeter, warmer pink.

"Did n't I go to Montreal, then?"

"No. Though you may have to, later. There 's some legal formality to be gone through yet before we can be married."

"Oh, then we're still engaged."

"Indeed, yes! Don't think you're going to get out of it so easily. The legal papers are in Montreal. So, instead of being married on the 16th, as we had planned, we've had to wait, and you've brought me up here, on your way to Montreal."

"Is this the genial fiction that you've handed out to your friends, the newly-weds?"

"It is."

"How did they take it?"

"Hard. Maud — that 's Mrs. Lee — especially feels that she has a terrible weight of responsibility on her shoulders. She was going to

wire Gloria Greene until I told her that Mrs. Bond, the housekeeper, is Mr. Harmon's own second cousin and therefore a fully equipped chaperon."

"Is she?" said Remsen in surprise.

"How do I know?" returned the girl innocently. "She might be. I had n't asked her. But I had to invent something to pacify Maud."

"Invention," observed the admiring Mr. Remsen, " appears to be mere child's play for you."

"Even so, it did n't satisfy Maud. She quite insisted on my moving over to the Cottage, to be under her eye."

"You're not going to do that?" he cried apprehensively.

"And play the goosiest kind of gooseberry? Indeed, I'm not!"

"What comes next? Am I to meet the turtledoves?"

"If you don't, it will look suspicious."

"So it will. Let 's get it over with, then. I'll risk a small bet that after meeting Sir Montrose Veyze once, they won't care to repeat the experience."

"What are you going to do to them?"

"Treat them to an exhibition of British hauteur and superiority."

"Has n't that sort of thing rather gone out since the war?"

"Not in the family into which you've married, my dear young lady. With the Veyzes nothing ever comes in and nothing ever goes out. Don't you think that would be a good line to spring on them?" he added with animation.

"You must n't be too horrid," enjoined Darcy. "I don't want them to think I'm marrying a — a —"

"A lemon," supplied the other. "Speaking of lemons, don't you think it would be a pious idea for you to invite your fiancé to lunch with you?"

"Excellent. And you can practice your accent on Mrs. Bond."

Profound and awesome was the impression made upon that lady. She found it only natural that the couple should wander off immediately after the meal; though she would have been surprised enough at the actual basis of their desire for seclusion, which was that they might work out their plan for the encounter with the

honeymooning quartette. The boathouse, which commands the approach to the Farm, was selected for the scene of the presentation.

About mid-afternoon the Lees and the Woods appeared, motoring up the lower road, and were halted by Darcy, who, pink and excited, indicated a figure on the boathouse porch. The figure was tipped back in a chair, with its feet on the railing, smoking a pipe.

"Come and meet my Monty," invited Darcy.

Upon their approach, the figure removed its feet from the railing with obvious reluctance. It did not remove its pipe from its face at all. To the women it bowed glumly. To the men it offered a flabby half-portion of hand. Holcomb Lee took it and dropped it. Paul Wood looked at the fingers presented to him in turn, looked at Darcy, looked at the sky and observed dispassionately that it looked like rain.

"Vay likely. Beastly weathah!" grunted the other.

"Bad weather makes good fishing, they say up here," said Helen Wood, pleasantly. "Have you tried it?"

"Nothin' but sunfishes and little basses, they tell me. Beastly water!"

"You might find the hunting better," proffered Maud Lee.

"Huntin'? Where's one to find a decent mount?"

"Mrs. Lee means the shooting, dear," explained Darcy, sweetly.

"Haw! Nevah heard shootin' called huntin' before. No decent shootin', either. Tramped about all mornin' and flushed one chippin' squirrel."

"He means chipmunk," expounded the helpful Darcy. "Poor Monty finds our American speech so difficult."

"Beastly language," murmured the bogus baronet, resuming his seat.

"But surely," said the kindly-spirited Helen, "you find the mountains beautiful."

"Haw! Too crowded. No chance to turn about without knockin' people's elbows."

The visitors took a hasty departure.

"Stupid ass!" growled Lee before they were fairly out of earshot.

"Oh, for just one good swing at his fat head," yearned the husky Wood.

"Did you *ever* see such a boor!" was Helen's contribution to the symposium.

"He's *old*," disclosed the observing Maud. "That's a *wig* he had on. I'd swear to it. Poor Darcy!"

Dissolved in mirth, Darcy congratulated the amateur upon a highly distinguished performance.

"Did Gloria teach you to act like that?" she inquired.

"If Gloria would train me," he returned, "I could do something. But she won't waste time on an amateur. Do you know that she's one of the very best coaches in the profession?"

"I know that she's the most wonderful woman in the world. What she's done for me—"

"It's probably no more than she's done for hundreds of other people," said Remsen, and launched out into a panegyric of the actress which would have made a press agent feel like an amateur.

With more experience of men, Darcy would have known that this was the language of the highest type of admiration, but of nothing more. In her innocence she took it as a final confirmation of the scene she had witnessed in the studio.

"Gloria wants you to work, does n't she?" she asked shyly.

"Gloria's such a tremendous worker, herself, that she thinks every one ought to be busy on some job all the time. Does n't she get after you? You look far too much of the lily-of-the-field type to meet her approval."

"Lily-of-the-field, yourself!" returned the girl indignantly. "I've brought a lot of work up here with me. Can you say the same?"

"Guilty! I'm jobless, except as your present slave."

"Have you ever done anything worth while in the world?" Darcy challenged; but the smile with which she accompanied the words was indulgent.

He took silent counsel with himself. "At a class reunion I once chased a trolley-car on a dromedary," he said hopefully. "That made life temporarily happier for a good many people, including the dromedary, who was conducting the performance."

"Sir Monty — my real Sir Monty — used to be an officer in a camel corps," fabricated Darcy dreamily.

"Now, why drag in my fellow fiancé, just as

I was beginning to forget him?" he expostulated.

"We — you — he is n't to be forgotten," said the girl hastily.

"Of course not. I'm sorry. Tell me about him."

Attempting to do so, Darcy found that the flavor had unaccountably oozed out of her lie. Pretense and falsification with this man who had unprotestingly let himself in for an indefinite career of both on his own account, to aid a girl whom he did n't even know in what, for all he could tell, might be only an unworthy prank — well, it simply went against the grain.

"No; I don't believe I will just now," she returned. "I might confuse him with your masterly impersonation."

"Then tell me about yourself. What would you have done if you had n't found a ready-made Englishman on the bridal train?"

"Heaven only knows! Committed suicide, I think. I may have to come to that yet," she said dismally. "Oh, dear! The further it goes, the worse it gets. You've helped me out, for the present, but —"

"Then let me help you out some more," he

urged. "Murder, arson, forgery, bigamy, anything you wish. I'm an outlaw, anyway, and a crime or two makes no difference to me."

Underneath his lightness, she divined the deeper wish to be of service.

"Take off your disguise," she said quietly, "I want to look at the real you."

He obeyed, and endured the scrutiny of her intent eyes, smiling.

"Yes," she decided. "You'd be a real friend. I could trust you. And I want to. Oh, I do want to. I'm in an awful mess."

"Probably it is n't nearly as bad as it looks. Trot it out, and let's examine it."

"But it is n't my secret, alone. I've got a — a partner."

"The 'wicked partner'?"

"She *is n't* wicked."

"Oh, it's a *she!* The shadows deepen."

"And I've promised a hope-to-die promise."

"Beg off from it."

She jumped up, clapping her hands like a child. "I'll try. You go home now, and don't touch your telephone, for it's a party wire and I'm going to 'phone a night letter to my partner."

This is the night-letter which went to Gloria Greene.

Will you release me from promise and let me tell one person, very near to you, who can help? Also, may I tell same person that I know about you two?

DARCY

The entire telegram puzzled the recipient more than a little, particularly the last portion. Not understanding, she took the wisest course and played safe by wiring a veto. The wording of her reply caused much painful puzzlement in the virginal breast of the lady telegraph operator who, on the following morning, thus 'phoned it to Miss Darcy Cole:

"This the Farmhouse? . . . That Miss Cole? . . . I gotta telegram f'r you, Miss Cole, an' I d' knowz I ken make it all out. Sounds queer t' me. Shall I get a repeat? . . . Give it t' you first? All right. Jussuz you say. Ready? . . . '*Miss Dassy Cole, The Farm, Boulder Brook. No. Don't dare trust you with the truth. You do too well with the other thing.*' Get that? . . . yes; 's funny, ain't it? There's funnier comin'. Ready? . . . '*Keep it up till you hear from me by following letter.*' Now comes the queer part. '*Don't be a*

damp hool.' Get that? . . . Yes; hool . . . Me? *I* don't know what a hool is. Spell it? D-a-m-p; got that? . . . H-double o-l. Got that? Well, mebbe it *is* funny, but *I* don't get no laughter out of it. What? . . . Oh, yes; of course. Signed *Gloria.* Want me to get a repeat? No. Jussuz you say; I'm sat'sfied if you are. But theh ain't no sech a word in *my* dictionary. I jest looked it up."

Miss Darcy Cole, gazing out into a worldful of rain, mused upon the message, with its definite inhibition. For a moment she was tempted to derive some compensating mirth from the telegram by calling up the telegraph lady, advising her to re-read the cryptic sentence which had so disturbed her professional calm, by dividing the two words after the *m* instead of the *p* — and then listening for the reaction to the shock. But this she dismissed as not worth while.

"But I think I *am* one," she reflected drearily, "not to make Gloria release me, anyway."

Chapter XV

MISS DARCY COLE sat on the edge of Red Rock, swinging twenty dollars' worth of the very smartest obtainable boots, the personal selection of Miss Gloria Greene, over two hundred feet of shimmering October air. Behind her Mr. Jacob Remsen was using the residue of the atmosphere to replenish his exhausted lungs, for he had undertaken to keep pace with his companion up the face of the declivity, with all but fatal results. It is not well for a man who has been cooped up within a city house, exerciseless and under the espionage of a minion of the law, to compete on a thirty-per-cent grade with a woman who has just come from the training of Andy Dunne.

Lack of her accustomed outdoor exercise had simply lent zest to Darcy. Three days before, the rains had descended and the floods had come and kept on coming. Now, when the skies of this mountain region set out seriously to rain, the local ducks borrow mackintoshes. Several times the visitor at the Farmhouse had

ventured forth, only to be promptly beaten back to shelter.

There she would have led a lonely existence, for the bridal couples were weather-bound, and even the rural delivery was cut off (so that the promised letter from Gloria had n't arrived), had it not been for her neighbor of the Bungalow. Each morning he waded over the soaking mile, and, of course, in such weather a decent sense of hospitality compelled his hostess to keep him for luncheon and dinner. So they had come to know each other on an inevitable footing of unconscious intimacy, better, perhaps, than they normally would have done in the conventional encounters of a year's acquaintanceship; and he played for her and she sang to him; and they discussed people and differed about art, and agreed about books and quarreled about politics and religion, and were wholly and perilously content with one another and the situation.

On the afternoon of the fourth day the sun broke gloriously through, and Darcy challenged Remsen to make the precipitous ascent of the front of Red Hill.

Behold her, then, at the conclusion serenely

overlooking the lowland and the lake while her companion stretched out panting behind her.

"This is a peak on the Siberian front," she announced. "And I'm an outpost."

"What do you see, Sister Anne?"

"Wait and I'll tell you. An aeroplane" — she pointed to a wheeling crow above them — "has just signaled me —"

("Caw," said the crow; "Thank you," said Darcy and threw the bird a kiss.)

"— that a regiment is coming up from below. There's the advance guard."

She pointed down the sheer rock. Remsen moved across and looked over the edge. "That spider?" he inquired unimaginatively.

"He's just pretending to be a spider. But he's really a spy disguised as a spider. Now the question is, Shall I drop this bomb on him?"

She held a pebble above the toiling crawler.

"War is hell," observed Remsen lazily. "Why add to its horrors?"

"How far away it all seems!" said the girl dreamily. "Do you suppose, over there, it's beautiful and peaceful like this hillside one day,

and then the next — I guess I'll let my spy spider live," she broke off, dropping her chin in her hand.

Remsen sat down at her side.

"What's your soldier man like?" he asked abruptly.

"What? Who?" inquired the startled Darcy. "Oh, Monty!" Gloria's insufficient sketch came to her aid. "Why, he's short and round and roly-poly."

"Then I don't give a very exact imitation of him, do I?"

"Not very. And he's red and fierce-looking, with a stubby, scrubby mustache," she added, augmenting Gloria's description.

Her companion stared. "Not what I should call a particularly enthusiastic portaiture."

"Oh, but of course he's awfully nice," she made haste to amend. "Not really a bit fierce, you know, but very brave and — and" (eagerly casting about) "a lovely voice."

"What kind?"

"Barytone."

"And you sing together?" he asked gloomily.

"Oh, lots!"

"I suppose so." He gathered some loose stones and began idly to drop them over the rock's crest.

"There! You've given the alarm to the spy," she accused. "See him wigwagging at you! Now he'll go and report."

"Darcy!"

"Well?"

"You don't mind my calling you Darcy, do you?"

"N-n-no, I like it."

"I wonder if you'll mind what I'm going to say now."

"I don't believe I should mind anything you would say."

"It's about the little song. The one that you set right for me."

"Our song."

"Our song," he repeated with a wistful emphasis on the pronoun. "Darcy, you won't sing that — to him — will you?"

"No," she said. Her eyes were dimly troubled and would not meet his. "I won't sing that — to any one — again."

"Thank you," he said humbly.

"Oh, look!" she cried with an effort at gay-

ety. "The enemy! They approach. Let's go and meet 'em."

She jumped to her feet and pointed to a far stretch of the road where four figures were slowly moving along.

"That means I've got to put on my infernal whiskers and wig!" he groaned.

"Just think how long a vacation you've had from them," she reproached him.

"And my still more uncomfortable manners."

"Tone them down a little," she advised. "I think Holcomb and Paul are just about ready to turn on the haughty Britisher, and rend him limb from limb."

"Don't blame 'em," he said lazily. "But they seem to be turning off toward the village," he added, peering down into the valley.

"And the girls are coming on," said Darcy. "Probably they've got the mail."

"With foreign letters?" said Remsen jealously. "Did you leave a forwarding address?"

She shot a swift, indirect look at him. But he was gazing out over the regally garbed forest spread below them.

"Come along!" she urged. "We must hurry. We'll take the Bungalow trail, and I'll wait

while you put on your Veyze outfit. Then we'll catch the girls on their return from the Farm."

Having carried through the first part of this programme, they took the road together and presently came upon the two brides. Maud bore a folded newspaper as if it were a truncheon of official authority. Her expression was stern and important. Helen was obviously struggling with a tendency to hysterical excitement. Upon catching sight of Darcy and her escort, Maud marched with an almost military front, straight upon them, her fellow bride acting as rear guard.

"Darcy," said Maud, ignoring the now perfectly whiskered fiancé, "I should like to speak to you alone."

A qualm of mingled intuition and caution warned Darcy.

"What about, Maud?" she asked.

"A private matter which your fiancé can hear later," returned the uncompromising Maud.

"Please, Darcy," added Helen.

"Not at all," returned the girl with spirit. "Has it anything to do with Monty?"

"It has a great deal to do with him," was the grim response.

"Then he should hear it at the same time."

"Haw! By all means. Haw!" confirmed the fiancé, bringing his monocle to bear upon Maud and Helen in turn.

"Very well," said Maud in a your-blood-be-on-your-own-head voice. "Read that."

She thrust the newspaper into Darcy's hand, pointing to a penciled paragraph on the front page. To Darcy's eternal credit be it said, she succeeded in preserving a calm and unperturbed face, while she read the paragraph, and then passed it to her waiting fiancé.

It informed the world that, for distinguished service in the aerial corps, the King of England had, on the previous day, personally decorated Sir Montrose Veyze, Bart., of Veyze Holdings, Hampshire, England.

Chapter XVI

FOR the death, disappearance, or capture of Sir Montrose Veyze, of Veyze Holdings, Hampshire, England, Darcy was duly prepared, in a spirit of Christian fortitude and resignation. That fame might mark him out, thus forcing the issue for her, was wholly unforeseen. It took her completely aback. The Darcy of a year before would have collapsed miserably under it. But this was a different Darcy. She faced the accuser with a quiet smile, back of which her thoughts ran desperately around in circles, like a bevy of little rabbits cut off from cover.

"You've read what it says in the newspaper?" said Maud, in the accents of a cross-examining counsel.

"Yes. Oh, certainly!"

"Then perhaps you can explain."

Darcy shot a swift glance at the bogus Sir Montrose. He also was smiling. Most illogically Darcy's heart began to sing a little private Hymn of Hate of its own. What did he mean by standing there with a sickly grin on his silly

face when the whole fabric of their mutual pretense was being riddled?

(Herein she was ungrateful as well as illogical. The face was silly because she had compelled him to make it so. As for the rest, the smile was good enough of its kind. He was not smiling because he felt like it, but to conceal the fact that he was doing some high-pressure thinking of his own.)

From the smirking countenance of her ally, Darcy turned to the lowering front of the enemy.

"Well, you see," she said with an air of great candor, after deliberately tearing out the paragraph, "it's rather an involved matter."

"I don't see anything involved about it," returned the lofty and determined Maud. "Who is this man?"

"Yes; who is he?" echoed Helen, coming mildly to her support.

From the corner of her eye the badgered girl could see the object of the inquiry. Still smiling! It was too much. Then and there Darcy committed that ignoble act known and reprehended in the higher sporting circles, wherein Andy Dunne moves, as "passing the buck."

"THERE ARE TWO OF US TO THE DIVIDED TITLE"

"*You* tell them, Monty," she said sweetly.

Of a great statesman, now dead, it has been written:

> Cheated by treachery and beguiled by Fate,
> Once in his life we well may call him great.

Thus with Mr. Jacob Remsen *alias* Sir Montrose Veyze. Out of conscious nothing he had, in that precious moment's respite, evoked an instantaneous and full-fledged plan to meet the crisis.

Fixing upon Maud as the more formidable antagonist, he impaled her on the beam of his monocle.

"Haw!" he ejaculated. "You've heard about the Veyze Succession, I assume."

"Never," said Maud stoutly.

"*What?* Nevah heard of the King's Judgment? Why, my *deah* lady, we're as well known as the Tower of London or the — the Crystal Palace."

"In America, you see," explained the more pacific Helen, "these things don't get to us."

"But I assuah you," cried the other, turning his glassy regard upon her, "your atrocious American press has been quite full of it from time to time. Come, now! You're spoofing me.

You must have read of the Veyze divided title. What?"

Hypnotized by the glare of the monocle, Helen's imagination inspired her to confess that she did vaguely recall something about it, which was the more gratifying to the representative of the Veyzes in that he had introduced the press feature on the inspiration of the moment.

The less impressionable Maud was not to be diverted from the main issue.

"Even if we knew all about your family, it would not explain Sir Montrose Veyze being here in America at the same time that he is being received by the King in London."

"Wearing two swords. Does n't the press report mention that? It should," put in the Veyze representative conscientiously piling up picturesque detail to embellish and fortify his case. "Don't forget that, please. It's a Veyze prerogative."

"Is it a Veyze prerogative to be in two places at once?" queried the cross-examiner. "Or — there are n't two of you, I suppose."

"Of *cawse!*

The accused delivered the answer in a tone of

calm and wondering contempt. Obviously he was incredulous that such ignorance as his interrogator displayed could exist in a Christian country.

"*Two* Sir Montrose Veyzes? Of the same name and title?" Maud was glaring, now.

"Of *cawse!* The famous Veyze twins. Though we're not rahlly twins any more, you understand."

Under the calm and steady beam of the monocle, Maud weakened. "What are you famous for?" she asked, more amenably.

"Because there are two of us to the divided title. Bally hard for an American to understand, I'm afraid. It begins back in the early days of the title, quite before Columbus landed the Puritans at Bunker Hill, you know."

"Columbus was n't a Puritan, dear," corrected Darcy.

"No? Nevah heard anything against the man's morals, that I can recall."

"Never mind Columbus," said the interested Helen. "Do tell us about the Veyzes."

"Right-o! Two brothers were born — twins, d' you see? There was some natural confusion. Which was the heir — born first, you know?

Nobody could tell. The King was stayin' at Veyze Holdings then for the shootin'; very famous shootin'. The family referred it to him. Would he play the part of Solomon and decide? His Majesty graciously acceded to the request. He decreed that the title should thenceforth be a dual one. It's remained so ever since. We don't produce twins any more, but the two eldest sons of the line inherit title and property jointly, and each carries two swords at court. There's Sir Montrose and Sir Montrose II. I'm II."

"How romantic!" breathed Helen.

"Rah-ther. We pride ourselves on that sort of thing, we Veyzes."

As the glory of his performance developed before her enraptured mind, the Hymn of Hate died out within Darcy, to be succeeded by a Pæan of Praise.

"And now," said she severely, "I should think you girls might have the decency to apologize to Sir Montrose."

"Rah-ther!" confirmed her ally.

"I'm awfully sorry," said Helen contritely.

"I'll apologize when I'm proved wrong," returned Mrs. Lee dubiously. "We'll know soon enough."

"Yes? And how?"

"Mr. Wood is trying to get the British Embassy on long-distance 'phone."

"My respects to Lord Wyncombe," said the undisturbed suspect. "But why go to so much trouble? Surely there's a simpler way."

"How?" asked Darcy, wondering what fresh audacity was developing in that fertile brain.

"Don't you have—er—public libraries in your American towns?"

"Certainly."

"Then perhaps there is one at Center Harbor."

"There is," answered Helen, so promptly that Darcy shot a glance of suspicion at her.

"What more easy than to drive over there at once," observed the suspect blandly, "and consult their Burke."

"Burke's Peerage, you mean?" said Darcy. "Perhaps they have n't one."

"They have n't," blurted Maud, and stopped, reddening.

"Apparently you've tried," remarked Darcy witheringly. "We appreciate your interest."

But Sir Montrose II was painfully shocked. "Not got a Burke!" he exclaimed. "Unbe-

lievable! What a country! I'll send for one, at once."

Impressed, despite herself, Maud Lee hesitated, looking from Darcy to her fiancé.

"It may be all right," she admitted. "I don't say that it is n't. But until it is cleared up beyond a doubt, don't you think, Darcy, you ought to come and stay with us?"

"I think not," put in Darcy's escort quietly. "I'm taking Miss Cole back to the Farm. If you've nothing further to add —"

"Nothing — now," answered the baffled Mrs. Lee.

"Then we'll bid you good-day."

Safely around the curve they stopped and faced each other.

"You wonderful person!" giggled Darcy hysterically. "How did you ever think of it!"

Assuming a grandiose pose he declaimed:

You may break, you may shatter, the Veyze if you will,
But the scent of the Montrose will cling to it still.

"To get down to prose, how long will it cling?" she asked thoughtfully.

"Allowing for inevitable official red tape, I should say anywhere from twenty-four hours to a month."

"Paul Wood has a cousin in the State Department."

"In that case, nearer the twenty-four hours than the month."

Darcy seated herself on a boulder and took her chin into her cupped hands. "Let me think," she murmured.

Remsen watched her as she considered and would have given much to be able to read her mind. Presently she looked up.

"Do you mind leaving me here?" she inquired.

"Yes," he said.

"Why?"

"I always mind leaving you. It gives me a lost feeling."

She nodded. "Yes; I know what you mean. I feel it, too."

"Do you?" he cried eagerly.

"You've been so wonderfully good to me all through this queer mess," she supplemented, a little hurriedly.

He disregarded this. "Besides," he said, "I'm afraid this is going to be our last walk."

She looked her startled question.

"What I'd like, of course," he pursued, "is

to stay here and face it through with you. But that 's going to be worse for you than if I went, is n't it?"

"I'm afraid it is."

"Then it's up to me to leave."

"But what if they find you and take you back to New York?"

"I've got to take the risk. They're pretty likely to find out about me here if they undertake a Veyze investigation."

"That's true," she cried. "I've made this place impossible for you as a refuge."

"Not you. I did it myself. I'd do it again — a thousand times — for these last four days."

"When would you go?"

"To-night. Eleven o'clock. Meredith."

"Wait till to-morrow."

His heart leaped. "We're to have this evening together?"

"No," she said gently. "I want this evening to myself. I have to think."

"I'm a marvelous stimulus to thought," he pleaded.

She shook an obstinate head.

"Might I walk back to the Farm with you?"

"No; please. I'd rather you did n't." She

rose and laid her hand in his. "You've been a very parfait, gentil knight," she said.

"Darcy!"

But she was already swinging up the hill with that free, lithe, rhythmic pace of hers. At the summit she turned and waved. For one brief second he saw her sweet, flushed profile clear against the sweet, flushed sky. It disappeared leaving earth and heaven dim and void.

Remsen turned blindly homeward. He knew, at last, what had happened to him.

Chapter XVII

ALL that afternoon and well into the evening, Darcy Cole, at the Farmhouse, sat and wrote and wrote and wrote.

All that afternoon and well into the evening, Jack Remsen, at the Bungalow, sat and smoked and mused and let his pipe go out and relighted it and mused again.

All that afternoon and well into the evening, the four amateur sleuths at the Lodge waited for a reply from Washington which did n't come.

At a point a mile or so above these human processes a large, cold cloud sprung a million leaks and sifted down a considerable quantity of large, soft snowflakes, and continued so to do until the air was darkened and the earth whitened with them.

Through this curtain, after a time, frightened but determined, tramped Darcy Cole. Through this curtain tramped also Jack Remsen, deep in such trouble of heart as he had never known before, and most undetermined. Both were headed for the same spot, the mail-

box at the entrance from the main road to the byway which leads up to the Bungalow.

Having started considerably earlier than Jack, Darcy got there first. She opened the box, dropped in her note, and proceeded to another mail-box some distance along the road and opposite the Island, where she deposited a second epistle. That left her two and a half hours in which to make the ten miles of dark, heavy road to Meredith. If it were too little, she had learned of a trail through meadowland and forest which would cut off nearly two miles. Darcy did n't like woods at night — most of us don't, if we're honest with ourselves — but she proposed to catch that train.

Now, an all-wise government has ordained that upon rural delivery boxes there shall be a metal flag which works automatically with the raising and the lowering of the lid. Upon reaching the Bungalow box, shortly after the wayfarer from the Farmhouse had passed, Jack Remsen observed with surprise that the flag, which he knew to have been down, was raised.

"How 's this?" inquired the wayfarer, addressing the box. "I've been here and got the

noon delivery, and the postman comes only once a day. Yet you're flying signals."

As the box did not respond, Remsen opened it and felt inside. Darcy's note rewarded his explorations. By the light of successive matches and at the cost of scorched fingers, he read it:

Good-bye, Knight. Your service is over. It has been an ungrateful one. But I am more grateful than I can say. You must not go. You must stay. I have written to Helen — she is the kind one — and told her about it; just how I dragged you into it to take the real Sir Montrose's place. I had to tell her who you were. But your secret won't be betrayed. So you won't have to go away. You'll be safe here. I'm glad. I like to think of you here. It's been good — has n't it? Perhaps when you are able to come back to New York I'll see you at Gloria's some time.

I can't say a millionth part of what I want to. I could n't even if there were time. You've been so good to me — so good. And all you've had for it is trouble. I'm sorry.

Good-night, Knight. D. C.

"Even if there were time." As has been indicated, Jack Remsen's mind could, on occasion, work swiftly.

Time for what? Why should she be pressed for time? Obviously, because she was going

away. And she would leave that note only just before her departure. That could mean only the eleven o'clock train from Meredith: the train he had intended taking before she asked him to postpone his departure until the morrow. Of course; so that he should get her note! On her way to the station she would leave the explanatory and damnatory letter for Helen Wood at the Island. Well, it would be a long time before that letter reached its addressee!

Examination of the blanketed ground confirmed his reasoning. There were the small, clear-set footprints, infinitely pathetic in the black wildness of the night. As he well knew from experience, catching up with Darcy Cole when she was set on getting somewhere was a job for the undivided attention of the briskest pedestrian. He set out along the road at a dog-trot.

His first stop was for the purpose of committing a felony, punishable by several years in the Federal penitentiary. It took him about a second to complete the crime, and, as he left the rifled mail-box behind, his inside pocket quite bulged with the fat letter wherein Darcy had set forth her circumstantial but by no means

complete confession which was to exculpate her partner and inculpate herself. Remsen's heart beat a little faster under that bulky epistle with its contents of courage and self-sacrifice.

At the door of a late-autumnal cottage he borrowed a flash. With this he could plainly discern the trail of the little feet, blurred but not obliterated by the snowfall. His watch indicated a quarter after nine. He jogged on with high hopes.

On a long, straight, level stretch he let himself out for a burst of speed. Perhaps, from the summit of the hill in which it terminated, he might catch a glimpse of her, for the moon was now trying its best to send a struggling ray through the flying wrack of cloud. Tenderly he pictured to himself the vision of her; head up to the storm, the strong, lithe shoulders squared, skimming with that easy, effortless pace of hers that had in it all the grace of perfectly controlled vigor.

Halfway across the open space he slackened up to cast the light of the flash on the road.

No footmarks were visible.

Remsen cried out, with the shock of his dismay. He cast about him on all sides. No result.

Struggling to keep cool, he turned back, going slowly, careful to miss no trace which intent scrutiny might discover. A quarter of a mile back he picked up the trail where she had left the road to cross a brooklet and take to the open fields. Her object he guessed; to cut across a broad and heavily wooded hill, thus saving herself some two miles of travel where the road took a wide double curve.

Eased in his breathing by the enforced slowness of the search, he was now able to accelerate his pace. Halfway up the open hillside a sudden fury of storm descended, lapping him in whirling darkness. Ahead of him stretched the dead-black line of woodland. More by luck than direction, he came upon a gateway, and thus set foot to the forest path, less difficult to discern in such conditions than the open trail of the meadows. With his light he could follow it quite easily. But when he thought of Darcy, lightless and inexperienced in woodcraft, with only her strength and her courage to help her, wandering in that wilderness, his spirit sickened with terror. The numbed fingers of the hand which gripped the flash warned him of dropping temperature. One might easily freeze on such a

night, in the open. Worst of all, the marks in the snow were now all but invisible under the fresh fall.

He blundered desperately onward, shouting her name into the gale as he went. There was an answering call. He threw his light on. She rose from a fallen tree-trunk into the arc of radiance.

"I've been lost," she said, and walked straight to his arms.

Just for the comfort and safety and relief of it she clung to him, with no other or further thought than that where he was no harm could reach her. But now that she was found, Remsen's self-control broke under the reaction. His arms closed about her. With a shock of sweetness, amazement, and terror she felt his lips on hers — and answered them. For the briefest instant only. The thought of Gloria pierced through the rapture of the moment, a poisoned dart. She thrust herself back from him, her hands on his breast.

"Go away!" she sobbed. "You've no right. You know you've no right!"

As she had thought of Gloria, so now he thought of the Briton oversea, fighting in his country's service.

"I'VE BEEN LOST," SHE SAID, AND WALKED STRAIGHT TO HIS ARMS

"I know," he groaned. "Forgive me."

She stood back from him, staring with bewildered, dismayed eyes.

"I forgot for the moment that I'm only a counterfeit," he pleaded.

"You forgot — many things," said she slowly.

"Forgive me, Darcy," he said again. "It — it swept me off my feet — the sweetness of it. It was base — dishonorable — anything you want to call it; but when I felt you in my arms —"

"Oh, *don't!*" she wailed.

"Will it make it better or worse if I tell you that I love you as I never loved or thought I could love any woman?"

"Worse! Worse! Infinitely worse!"

"This is the end of me," he said. He spoke quietly and in a flat, even tone as a man might speak who knew that he was giving up everything in life worth having. "I'll not offend again. But — after I'd kissed you — you had to know. I could n't let you think it anything less than it was, the going out to you of a heart that I could no longer control."

"In dishonor!"

"If you will have it so. The dishonor is mine. You are untouched by it. . . . Now, let us get to other matters. Are you hurt?"

"No."

"Then you can follow me back?" he said.

"Where?"

"To the Farmhouse."

"I'll never go back to the Farmhouse."

"You must. I'm going away on this train."

"What good would that do? Have n't you read my note to you?"

"Of course. Otherwise I should n't have got on your trail."

"Then you must know that I've written the whole thing to Helen Wood, and even if I wanted to go back, now —"

"Dismiss that letter from your mind. I got it, on my way here."

"*You* took my letter to Helen? Did you read it?"

"Do you think me dishonorable in everything?" he returned quietly.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" cried the girl impetuously. "I don't think you dishonorable. I know you're not. I don't know what to think or do."

"Take this light and hurry back to the

Farmhouse. I've still got time for the train. Or I'll take you back and make the morning train."

"One thing I cannot and will not do: spend another night at the Farm."

"Is that your last word?"

"Yes." Obstinacy itself was in the monosyllable.

"Then I'll go with you to Meredith."

"I won't let you."

"I'll go," he retorted in a tone which ended that discussion.

Under his guidance and in silence they regained the main road. At Center Harbor he succeeded in getting a team to take them the rest of the way. Not until the end of the journey did Darcy speak to him.

"What shall you do now?"

"I don't know. Go somewhere," said he gloomily.

"You must go back."

"Boulder Brook — without you?" he said passionately.

"But where else can you go?"

"It does n't matter."

They stood in silence until her train pulled in.

"I shan't see you again, shall I?" he said wretchedly.

"You've made it impossible. Oh, why did you do it?" she wailed softly.

With no further word she turned from him and went into the car. Remsen stood, dazed with misery. Forward, something was shunted from an express car with a heavy crash. There was a babel of voices, a moment's delay. Darcy flashed out upon the steps again, her eyes starry. Remsen jumped to meet her. She caught his hands in hers with a swift, forgiving little pressure.

"I could n't leave you so," she said tremulously. "You've been too good to me. Good-bye, and — forget."

Before he could answer she was gone again.

Until the tail-light of the train glimmered into obscurity around the curve, Remsen stood uncovered in the gale. Then he turned to the miles of lonely road.

Chapter XVIII

DARCY, in her berth, sat huddled up and wide-eyed. She knew at last what had happened to her. The burning memory of that kiss in the woods had left nothing unrevealed to a soul as frank with itself as Darcy's had grown to be. She knew, too, what she had to face. There was no doubt or hesitancy in her thoughts, no weak attempt to justify herself or find an easy way out. If it had been any one but Gloria Greene whose happiness was at stake, Gloria who had picked her up from the scrap-heap of waste and made a living, pulsating, eager human creature of her, Darcy might have fought for her own hand. But how could a man who had loved Gloria Greene, and whom Gloria loved, care seriously for any other woman on earth? No; this was only a sudden, unreckonable infatuation on Jack Remsen's part. . . . Then she recalled the look in his eyes when they parted, and knew that her conscience was lying to her heart. In any case, her course was clear. She must be game.

In her deep trouble her thoughts turned to Gloria, the wise, kind counsellor, the safe refuge. But she would not do for this crisis! To betray Remsen to her — that was unthinkable, and nothing short of the whole truth would serve with Gloria. Darcy knew that she must fight it out alone. Never, not even in the old, dead days, had she felt so alone.

Human nature being what it is, there is nothing strange in the fact that, on her return to New York, Darcy shrank from meeting Gloria. Although the girl's conscience absolved her, except for that one, instinctive lapse when she had been caught off her guard, her sore heart pleaded guilty to the self-brought charge of a lasting disloyalty. With the thrill of Jack Remsen's kiss still in her veins, how could she face the woman to whom Remsen owed his allegiance, the woman who, moreover, had been the kindest, most effectual, most unselfish friend of her own unbefriended life?

Yet there remained to be concluded the obsequies of Sir Montrose Veyze, of Veyze Holdings, Hampshire, England. Those remains, of unblessed memory, must positively be removed from the premises before they gave rise to fur-

ther and even more painful complications. Darcy experienced the grisly emotions of a murderer with an all-too-obvious corpse to dispose of. First of all, Gloria's absolution from the promise of secrecy must be obtained, which she would doubtless be more than ready to accord, now that Sir Montrose had become too heavy a burden to carry; also Gloria's advice and aid if she would give it. Nerving herself for the encounter, Darcy went to see the actress and told her the whole (if she herself was to be believed) disastrous tale.

Gloria was too shrewd to believe quite that far. There were obvious hesitancies, blank spaces, and reservations wherever the name and deeds of Mr. Jacob Remsen, *alias* Sir Montrose Veyze II, or in his own proper person, entered into the narrative. And there was a something in the girl's eyes, deep down where the warm gray was lighted to warmer blue, which had n't been there before. It completed the woman in her. With an inner flush of creative pride Gloria communed with herself upon the new miracle:

"This is a wonderful and lovable thing that I have made." Instinctive honesty compelled

her, however, to add: "But somebody else has given the finishing touch."

She was too keen an observer not to suspect who her fellow creative artist was. Being of the ultra-blessed who hold their tongues until it is time to speak, Gloria made no comment upon this phase, but set her mind singly to the problem in hand as presented by Darcy's recital.

"It's time to own up," was her decision.

"I suppose so," agreed the girl. "I don't look forward to telling Maud."

"Let me handle Maud."

"Would you, Gloria? You *are* good. However well you do it, though," she added resentfully, "I suppose I'll be 'Poor Darcy' again without even the compensation of being 'Such a *nice* girl.'"

"Do you *feel* like 'Poor Darcy'?"

"No."

"Do you *look* like 'Poor Darcy'?"

The girl glanced at the long studio mirror back of her. "No, I don't," she replied, and two dimples came forward and offered corroborative testimony.

"Then whom is the joke on?"

The dimples vanished. "On me," said their erstwhile proprietor.

"Don't be an imbecile!" adjured her mentor.

"Can't help it," returned Darcy dolefully. "I've got the habit."

"Break it. Hark to the voice of Pure Reason (that's me). As long as you were 'Poor Darcy,' you had to invent a fiancé or go without, did n't you?"

"Yes."

"And your invention was sure to be a regular old Frankenstein monster, and to come back and devour you as soon as you were found out."

"I can hear the clanking of his joints this minute!"

"You can't. He is n't there. If you were still 'Poor Darcy,' there'd be no hope for you. You're not. You're something totally different."

"That's your view of it," returned the dispirited Darcy. "But to other —"

"It's anybody's view that is n't blind as a bat! Half the men you meet are crazy about you. Are n't they?"

"I have n't met many, lately," said Darcy demurely.

"You met plenty at our party. Even Maud and Helen saw the effect. Their eyes bunged out!"

"I don't see how their eyes bunging out is going to help explain Sir Montrose Veyze I, let alone Sir Montrose Veyze II."

"Why worry, when I'm here to take the burden from you? I propose," said Miss Greene relishingly, "to tell those girls the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

"Gloria! They'll pass it on and I'll be the laughing-stock —"

"Will they! I dare 'em to pass it on!"

"Why should n't they?" cried the girl. "It's just the sort of thing that Maud would revel in."

"Allowing that she could get away with it, you're right. She could n't."

"Could n't make people believe it, you mean?"

"Never. Never in the world!"

"But it's *true!*"

"Dear and lovely innocence! Do you think *that* helps it to get itself believed? Besides, the main part of it is n't true."

"I mean it's true that it is n't true, and if Maud tells the truth about what is n't true —"

"Come out of that skein of metaphysical wool, kitten," laughed Gloria. "You're tangled.

Here's what is n't true; that you're 'Poor Darcy' who has to get lovers out of books for lack of 'em in real life."

"But I *have* been."

"All right. Let Maud tell the people that used to know you, and make them believe it. There's only a few of them and they don't count. As for trying it on any one else, all she'll get will be a reputation for green-eyed jealousy. How would anybody convince Jack Remsen, for instance" (Darcy winced, and Gloria's quick sense caught it), "that you had to invent an imaginary adorer because you could n't get a real one? No, indeed! The evidence is all against it from Exhibit A, Darcy's eyes, down to Exhibit Z, Darcy's smart little boots. For an unattractive girl, your little effort of the imagination would be a pathetic, desperate, ridiculous invention, with the laugh on the inventor. For an attractive girl, it's just a festive little joke. Don't you see how it works out? The pretty girl (that's you) can have all the adorers she wants, but she prefers to take in her friends by inventing one. Is the joke on the girl or her friends? One guess. Why, oh, why," concluded Gloria addressing the Scheme of the

World in a burst of self-admiration, "was n't I born a professor of logic instead of an actress?"

"It sounds reasonable," confessed Darcy. "But will Maud and Helen be clever enough to see it?"

"Probably not."

"Then —"

"Therefore I shall point it out to them in my inimitable and convincing style, with special hints as to the perils and disadvantages of getting a reputation for jealousy of a better-looking girl!"

"Then that's all settled," said Darcy with a sigh. "Now what about Sir Montrose? The real Sir Montrose, I mean."

"Well, *what* about him?"

"Suppose he should come over here and hear about it?"

"He won't. He's engaged to an English girl. I've just heard."

"How nice and considerate of him! You know, Gloria, I could almost love that man."

"Could you? What about the bogus Sir Montrose?" asked the actress significantly.

Darcy flushed faintly. "Well, *what* about him?" she echoed.

"How much does *he* know?"

"Not very much. Do you think I ought to tell him?"

"Does the child expect me to manage her conscience as well as her affairs!" cried the actress. "If any one is to tell him, you're the one."

"I suppose so," assented Darcy, spiritlessly, and made her farewells in no more cheerful frame of mind than when she had come, albeit one load was off her shoulders.

For a week or more Gloria neither saw nor heard from the girl. At the end of that time she did, to her surprise, encounter the erstwhile bogus Sir Montrose without his hirsute adornments and in his proper person of Mr. Jacob Remsen, sauntering idly along the Park. Hailing him, she took him into her taxi. Mr. Remsen was not looking his customary sunny self.

"Did the law's minions catch you in spite of your whiskers?" she asked.

"No. Case was compromised. So I've come back."

"And what are you going to do now?"

"I'm going to work."

"Work! You?" said the actress with un-

feigned and unflattering surprise. "Why? What's the answer?"

"Ambition," replied Mr. Remsen in a lifeless voice.

"Sounds more like penal servitude," commented Gloria. "And what is to be the scene of your violent endeavors?"

"Ask the Government," he replied wearily. "Washington, maybe. Or perhaps San Francisco or Savannah. Or right here in New York, for all I know."

"Jerusalem and Madagascar
And North and South Amerikee,"

quoted the other. "Are you about to become an American courier for the peripatetic Mr. Cook, his agency?"

"Got a chance to go into the Treasury Department," answered Remsen gloomily.

"Don't give up heart," she encouraged him. "Strong young men like you often survive the rigors of that life. Pity they don't send you to London, where your monocle and your accent would be appreciated. By the way, have you seen your quondam fiancée since your return?"

"No," said Remsen.

Gloria, noting that he winced much as Darcy had winced, wondered, and turned the talk to other topics which gave her opportunity to revolve the problem of the two masqueraders in her mind. That there was a problem she was now well assured. She took it to luncheon with her, after dropping one of the subjects of it, and came to a conclusion characteristic of her philosophy and worthy of a mathematician; namely, that the figures in any problem work out their own solution if properly arranged. She decided to do the arranging after luncheon by telephone.

She sent word to Darcy to meet her at the studio without fail at five. Then she got Remsen at his club and told him that a matter of importance had come up about which she wanted to see him at her place about five-fifteen. Whether she herself could get through her engagements and be back home at that hour she did not know nor particularly care. Her duties as hostess did not weigh heavily upon her in this respect. Let Jack or Darcy or both reach the place before her; it did n't greatly matter. Perhaps it would even be better that way.

Furthermore, Gloria Greene was very deeply and happily preoccupied with certain affairs of her most intimate own, which will serve to explain a slight vagueness in her usually accurate schedules, with consequences quite unforeseen by her managerial self. For one of Miss Greene's errands that day had been to send a vitally important telegram which called for an answer in person on the following day. That the answer in person might arrive that same day she had not reckoned. She had consulted only railway time-tables, forgetting that far-and-swift-flying chariot of Cupid, the high-powered automobile.

Chapter XIX

ALL things threaten a guilty conscience. Haunted by the unlaid ghost of Sir Montrose Veyze, Darcy, on receipt of Gloria's message, fearfully anticipated that some new complication had arisen. Having concluded a satisfactory interview with B. Riegel & Sons (whose representative was impressed anew with her splendor) she reached Gloria's studio a little before the appointed time. The place was empty. For a few moments she idled about, examining the new pictures, glancing casually at books, and presently drifted to the piano seat.

Insensibly guided by memories, her fingers wandered into the little, soothing cradle-song which she had first heard in that very spot from Jack Remsen's lips. Long ago, it seemed; so long ago! Once she played it through, and then in her tender and liquid voice she crooned it softly.

She did not hear the door open and close. But she felt a light draught of air, and the next instant a man's figure loomed through the

gathering dusk, a man's strong hands fell on her shoulders, and a man's glad voice cried:

"Dearest!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Darcy in consternation.

"Good Lord!" ejaculated the newcomer in an altered and horrified tone.

Darcy turned to confront Thomas Harmon. She had seen him but once, but she carried the clearest memory of his quiet eyes, his vital personality, his big, light-moving, active frame, and his persuasively friendly manner. Mr. Harmon was a person not easy to forget. Now he was covered with confusion.

"I — I *really* beg your pardon," he stammered. "It was inexcusably stupid of me."

Darcy held out her hand, smiling. "I'm Darcy Cole, Mr. Harmon," she said. "And I have a great deal to thank you for."

"Me?" said the big man in surprise. "I'd be glad to think so, but —"

"But you don't know why," she concluded, kindly intent on putting him at his ease. (Darcy, who a year before would have been on live coals of embarrassment before any strange man!) "You gave me a refuge at Boulder Brook when I very much needed one."

"Oh! So you're Gloria's — Miss Greene's little friend. I hope they made you comfortable."

"Did n't you get a note from me telling you how delightful your place is?"

"No. But, you see, I've been away. Just got in."

They stood looking at each other for a moment, the girl demure but dimpling, the man still in some confusion of spirit. Then, encouraged perhaps by the dimples, perhaps by some aura of fellowship and understanding which exhaled from the girl, Harmon burst out boyishly:

"I've heard a lot about you, Miss Darcy, and I believe you're a — well, a good fellow."

"I am," Darcy assured him with absolute conviction.

"Well, after the break I made I've got to tell somebody or *bust.*"

"Tell me," invited the girl. "Whom did you think I was when you rushed on me?"

"Gloria, of *course!*"

"Gloria!"

Although untrained in fancy gymnastics, Darcy's brain whirled around ten times in one

direction, clicked, and whirled around ten times on the reverse. She put her hand to her head dizzily, striving to readjust her thoughts.

"Is n't it very sudden?" she faltered.

"About as sudden as Jacob's little affair with Rachel," laughed Harmon. "It's been a seven-year siege on my part."

"But, Gloria —"

"Oh, it's been a heap suddener for Gloria. In fact she only — I only got the word to-day. And here I am." He examined the girl's troubled face. "You don't look exactly pleased," he added, crestfallen.

"Indeed, you must n't think that," she cried earnestly. "But I — I — I thought it was Mr. Remsen." In her bewilderment she blundered on. "I saw her k-k-k-" Too late she strove to catch herself on the brink of a shameful betrayal.

"You saw her kiss Jack," he interpreted, smiling. "He's a sort of a third cousin or something, and a privileged character, anyway."

"I did n't know," answered the girl. Then, recovering herself: "Oh, Mr. Harmon, I *am* so glad. I believe you're just as fine as Gloria is — and that's the most any one could say."

"My dear," he said more gravely. "Nobody on earth is that. But — well, I want to shout and sing and — Play your music again, won't you? Maybe that'll help."

Maybe, thought Darcy, it would help her, too; for she also wanted to shout and sing, and, most contradictorily, to hide and cry — and wait.

Forgetful, in the turmoil of her mind, of the pledge to Jack Remsen about the little song which was to be their one keepsake of those enchanted days in the mountains, she turned back to the piano and hummed the melody.

"It's built for a second part," commented Harmon. "Do you mind if I try it?"

So she went over it again, and he struck in, in a clear, charming barytone, and with a singularly happy inspiration of a tenor part. Over and over it they went, she suggesting, and he perfecting his second; and they were still at it when the door opened again, upon deaf ears.

In the hallway Jack Remsen stopped dead. The first thing of which he was conscious was that the voice of the girl he loved and had continued to love against every dictate of conscience and honor was running like sweet fire

through his veins again. Instantly the fire became bitter and scorching. For there was another voice, accompanying and fulfilling hers, the barytone which she had adduced as one of her British lover's chief charms.

(Remsen had to admit the quality of the voice, now raised in *his* song. The song which she had promised to keep as his and hers; the one thing which he might claim of her!)

A hot anger rose in his heart and as quickly faded. Why should n't she sing that song with her lover? At most it was an idle promise which he had had no right to exact. He conquered an impulse to turn and leave. No; the thing had to be faced. Might as well face it now. When the chords died down he advanced to the door and spoke.

Darcy whirled on her seat, and rose, very white. His one glance told Remsen that she was lovelier than ever. Then everything was swallowed up in the amazement of finding Harmon there. Harmon — alone in the dusk with Darcy where he had expected to find the fiancé — his song — and that charming, clear barytone of which Darcy had boasted in Sir Montrose!

An explanation came to his mind, light in the

darkness. It was just another masquerade — Darcy apparently specialized in them — and Veyze had been but a blind for Harmon, the real lover in the background, all the time. He felt Harmon wringing his hand in welcome and heard himself saying with a creditable affect of heartiness:

"Then I suppose it's you that I'm to congratulate."

"It is," returned the other, chuckling joyously. "Though how on earth you knew it I can't conceive."

"Is n't it evident enough?" said Jack.

He marched over to Darcy. She saw him changed, thinned, with lines in his smooth face; lines of thoughtfulness, of self-control, of achieved manhood, and her heart was in her eyes as they met his and drooped.

"And you," he said. "I wish you every happiness. I could n't wish you better than Tom Harmon."

"*What!*" cried that complimented but astounded gentleman. "Me? Miss Darcy?"

"Well, if it is n't you," said Jack lifelessly, looking from one to the other: "will you kindly tell — "

"It *is* me, but it is n't her," broke in Harmon, with the superb disregard of grammar suitable to the occasion. "Man alive, it's *Gloria!*"

As if in confirmation, Gloria's voice came to them, down the hallway.

"Darcy! Where are you, child?"

Two chairs which foolishly attempted to impede Mr. Thomas Harmon's abrupt and athletic progress across the floor were sent to the janitor next day.

"Tom!" cried Gloria's voice in a breathless and different tone. Then the door slammed.

Jack Remsen turned to Darcy. "So that's it, is it?" he said slowly.

"That," answered Darcy, "is it. Is n't it splendid!"

"Could n't be splendider — for those most concerned. What about the rest of it?"

"The rest of it?" Her brows were raised in dainty puzzlement, but her eyes refused to meet his.

"Where is Veyze?"

"On his way back to the East, I understand," said Darcy carefully.

"When is he coming over?"

"Not at all."

"Are you going over there — to England?"

"No."

"You're not looking me in the face."

"I — I don't want to look you in the face. You're not pretty when you make a — a catechism of yourself."

"Darcy," said Remsen, "there's been something queer about this Veyze business from the start. As long as I could help I did, did n't I?"

"Yes," said the girl quite low.

"And I asked no questions?"

"No," she said, even lower.

"But now I've got to know. I've got a right to know."

"Why?" It was the merest whisper.

"Because I've come back loving you more than when you left me. I would n't have believed it possible. But it's so. Every hope and wish of my heart is bound up in you. Darcy, is it broken off between you and Montrose Veyze?"

She raised her eyes to his. The color flushed and trembled adorably in her face. She spoke, clear and sweet as music.

"There never was anything between me and Sir Montrose Veyze."

"You mean," said the astounded Remsen, "that you were only acquaintances?"

"If Sir Montrose walked into the room this minute I should n't know him."

"But, how — "

"I made it up. All. Every bit of it." She put her hands together in a posture of half-mocking plea. "Please, sir, do I have to tell you the whole shameful story?"

He caught the hands between his. "There's only one thing you have to tell me, Darcy. Shall I tell you what it is?"

There was no need. The hands stole to his shoulders, and then around his neck. "Oh, I do! I do!" she breathed. "There never was any Veyze, or any engagement, or anything or anybody — but — just — you."

"But, Darcy, love," he demanded, holding her close, "why would n't you give me a chance, when we were at Boulder Brook?"

"I — I — I thought it was G-g-g-gloria with you, all the time."

"You did n't! How could you miss seeing that I was mad about you from the first? Why did n't you tell me what you thought?"

With her cheek against his and her lips at his

ear, she confessed, between soft, quick catchings of the breath:

"Because I was afraid — of letting you see how much I cared. I — I've been such a little fool, Jack, dear. And — and about the Veyze thing — I'm a cheat — and an awful little liar — and — and — and — and a forger, I guess. But it never hurt anybody but myself — and I've been loving you all the time — until my heart — almost broke."

"I'm pretty good at those crimes myself," returned her lover comfortingly. "And worse. I've robbed a mail-box. When did you ever descend to such desperate depths as that?"

"I tried to kill my trainer," retorted Darcy proudly; "and he's the best friend I ever had except Gloria. He's the one that made me presentable."

"I'll ask him to be best man," said her lover promptly. "As for our crimes, I'll tell you, darling of my heart; let's turn over a new leaf and live straight and happy ever after."

"Let's," agreed Darcy with a sigh of happiness.

Half an hour later Tom Harmon and Gloria outside heard music, the cradling measures of

the little song, and crept to the door hand in hand. They caught the mention of Boulder Brook and shamelessly listened. The pair within were already future-building on Tom Harmon's property.

"And we'll get on that same train right after the wedding," said Remsen.

"And get off at Weirs," added the prospective bride.

"And have the festive native there to meet us with 'th' ole boat.'"

"And take that awful, bumpy road slower than we did before."

"And go straight to the Farmhouse—"

"I'm sorry, children," the rightful owner of the coolly appropriated property broke in upon their dreams; "but you can't have the Farmhouse."

"Oh!" said Darcy, hastily moving north-by-west on the piano seat.

"That's taken," explained Harmon, beaming upon Gloria, "for another couple."

"Heaven bless 'em!" said Jack heartily.

"Thank you! You," concluded their past and future host, "may have the Bungalow."

Chapter XX

SOMEWHERE in Siberia, quite unaware of his activities as an absentee Cupid, Sir Montrose Veyze, of Veyze Holdings, Hampshire, England, with a spread of huge composition planes where his dovelike wings should have been, and a quick-firer at his side in place of bow and quiver, reached out of his aeroplane for the long-overdue mail and read with languid surprise an invitation to be present at the marriage of Miss Darcy Cole to Mr. Jacob Remsen, in New York City, New York, on the preceding Christmas day.

"Now, where the dayvle," puzzled Sir Montrose Veyze as he rose into the clouds "did I ever know those people?"

THE END

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